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Public Use of Reason in the Kitchens

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What is education?

PRÓBLĚMA

An Anthology on Education

What is education?

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WHAT IS EDUCATION?

An Anthology on Education

PRÓBLÈMA

7	Introduction
19	About this book
23	Henrik Jøker Bjerre Public Use of Reason in the Kitchens
55	Wendy Brown The Vocation of the Public University
91	Elie During An Interview with Elie During: Education in an Age of Distraction
103	Chris Fynsk Autonomy and Academic Freedom
129	Siegfried Zielinski New Faculties - (Art)Universities as Surprise Generators
157	Steen Nepper Larsen What is Education? — A Critical Essay
187	Kirsten Hyldgaard What Causes Education? Anxiety and the Object <i>a</i>
209	Mladen Dolar 7 Questions for the Professor
223	Steen Ebbesen From the Academy to KUA. A Brief History of Learned Institutions or Madhouses

INTRODUCTION

What is education? This question demands that we not only describe the general nature of education, but also that we describe the qualities, problems and conflicts, which make up the present reality of education. The question is thus as philosophically pertinent as it is politically urgent — it demands reflection but not without imposing confrontation. To pose it is a way of questioning the answers that define and govern what education is and can be said to be today.

So what is said of education today? It might be hailed as a human right, thought of as a means against poverty and inequality; it might be considered an answer to market demands, a producer of workforce, consumers and citizens; or it might be defined simply in accordance with a quantifiable measure. Answers such as these are presented to us by governments and administrators of education. What they all have in common, however, is that they only value education in instrumental terms, as a practical means to an end. They do not judge education on its own terms — as an institution of insight, learning and knowledge — and thus they do not provide an answer to the question of education itself.

In these times where education is not merely a pastime of the privileged few, but a necessary means to ensure one's livelihood, and where institutional autonomy too often only means becoming enslaved by commercial or private interests, the old dream of strong educational institutions unregulated by private or political influences is severely challenged. Thus perhaps, we face the same questions Plato and Socrates did when challenged by the Sophists of their time, and like them, we must ask ourselves: how can true insight be found? Can true knowledge be bought and institutionalized or, rather, must it be found in a community of real friends, lovers and rivals of knowledge itself?

If the answers to the question of education today similarly seem lost in the conflicts of the *polis*, it does not mean that we should allow our questioning to stagnate in the rigidity of the answers presented, or that we should disregard it altogether. As Hannah Arendt points out in her essay "The Crisis in Education", we must recognize "the opportunity provided by the very fact of crisis — that tears away facades and obliterates prejudices — to explore into whatever has been laid bare of the essence of the matter". We should not deny the questions raised by the crisis nor the very meaning of *krísis* — a situation which requires a decision — that is, if we deny it becoming a moment of reflection and a possibility for action. As Arendt continues: "A crisis forces us back to the questions themselves and requires from us either new or old answers, but in any case

direct judgements.” And so we must Socratically confront those who claim to know, those who claim to have the right answers; just as those who know only too well what is not known will have to continue their questioning; for it is not our ability to formulate the right answers that will allow us to shed light on the nature of education, but rather, our ability to ask questions; to judge, reflect and think. The purpose of this anthology is to provide an opportunity to exercise these capabilities, to encourage thinking.

However, individual critical thinking will never be enough on its own; the educations of a society do not evolve by the progress of individuals, education needs a community to thrive. That is, a community that reflects on its own relation to the past and the future, as Immanuel Kant argued: “[Education] can advance only step by step, and a proper idea of the peculiar nature of education can arise only as one generation hands down its experience and wisdom to the one following, and this in turn, adding something, gives it over to *its* successor”.

We need to take this lesson to heart while pursuing new ways of thinking, recalling the old meaning of the word university: *universitas magistrorum et scholarium* — it is a community of those who strive, masters as well as novices, in a common pursuit of knowledge (which, however, is not the same as saying that it is a democratic community of equals, see p. 236 in the present volume).

Any educational institution is an institution of community, and it is the communities of the schools which must stand together against the onslaught of cutbacks and must insist on this character of community in opposition to all the ‘incentives’ directed at individuals, pitting them against each other. Teachers must stand by students who revolt, students must stand by teachers in pressure-filled working conditions. We must stop thinking of ‘student politics’ only — a remnant from ‘68, a different time to be sure — and instead think of an ‘educational’ or ‘university’ politics which can stand together against our common challenges. And if all defensive measures fail, we must reinvent our community from the broken shards of our academies, universities and educational institutions, asking once again: What is an education worthy of the name?

*

The contributions to this volume are, each in their own way, results of this urgent question. To a great extent, they reflect the understanding of the question not ‘merely’ as a matter of ontology, but indeed also as one of normativity. Regardless of the perspective from which one approaches the question “What is education?”, it seems clear that the answer will never be neutral, and furthermore that every answer proposed inevitably poses new questions. Education truly appears to be a question which requires us to think and rethink how we institutionalize thinking.

Each contributor faces this problem differently, but they all remain faithful to the problem of education.

The contributors themselves come from various backgrounds such as educational studies, philosophy, psychoanalysis, sociology and philology, yet certain recurring thoughts and themes can be found throughout the texts: the role of education within the public and private sphere, freedom or autonomy as both the end and precondition for education, the relation between teaching and research, the economical influence of privatization and financialization, the effects and threats of instrumentalization.

These themes addressed provoke new necessary questions: What happens to teaching when it is no longer research based and vice versa: what happens to research? What role should education have within the public and private sphere, and how should public and private interest be allowed to influence education? How should we conceive the university in a time where economical structures and incentives influence even the purpose of education itself? Can we, as students and teachers, reclaim the notion of *vocation* from the instrumental meaning it has taken on today, and restore it to its literary sense, that is, as a calling, as a passionate pursuit of knowledge?

Henrik Jøker Bjerre

Associate Professor, *Institute for learning and philosophy*
Aalborg University

Henrik Jøker Bjerre employs Kant's concept of public and private use of reason to shed light on the discussions today regarding the future of the academy. He emphasizes the importance of the public use of reason, which is a matter of serving reason itself rather than some external authority. The very possibility of a public use of reason, he claims, is threatened today as a consequence of the increasing privatization of public space, not least the universities. Based on the idea that any space, as long as it is not serving private interests, can enable the use of public reason, he argues that a solution might be found outside the institutions.

Wendy Brown

Professor, *Political Science, University of California, Berkeley*

Wendy Brown discusses the concept of *vocation* or *Beruf* as it is presented by Max Weber. Contrary to the original sense of the word, where it is conceived as a *calling*, today it is, ironically, understood as job training — or *artes mechanicae*, as opposed to *artes liberales*. She argues that the increased role of financialization within education, by encouraging financially privileged or risk-willing students, influences the students' choice of academic field, resulting

in the dominance of ‘rational’, in the sense of economically rewarding, subjects of study. What we risk, according to Brown, is a loss of freedom.

Elie During

Associate professor of philosophy, *Paris Nanterre University*, seminar lecturer at the *École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris*, and professor of philosophy at the *European Graduate School*.

In an interview, Elie During reflects on his own experiences as a student and as a teacher of philosophy. He describes it as the privilege of teachers to be able to lead an indefinitely prolonged life as student. In this way, he points to the shared interests and problems of professors and students. In discussing the dynamics of education he designates “distraction” as one of the most grave challenges, but also as an opportunity for creative thought.

Christopher Fynsk

Professor and Dean of the Division of Philosophy, Art, and Critical Thought, *European Graduate School in Saas-Fee, Switzerland* and Professor Emeritus at the *University of Aberdeen*.

Christopher Fynsk emphasizes the importance of inter-disciplinarity, not merely as an attempt to further the functionality or technical skills suitable for a “knowledge

economy“, but for the sake of viewing education as a whole. By isolating each subject from one another, we risk falling into an abstract jargon which veils the connection between subjects. With regard to education as a quest for freedom, what is to be learnt is inherently a form of auto-didaxy and the “thing” that education, regarded as a whole, approaches is *res publica*, a commitment to education as inherently public, i.e. as accessible regardless of advanced preparation.

Siegfried Zielinski

Rector, *Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design*

Zielinski’s contribution is a draft for the faculties of an imaginary academy. Inspired by the Deleuzian thought of the Martinican writer Edouard Glissant, Zielinski views the faculty not as a clearly delimited area of science, but rather as an energetic field that cultivates the connection between different territories of thought and art.

Steen Nepper Larsen

Associate professor, *Danish School of Education*

Steen Nepper Larsen constructs a small and colourful systematic ontology of education. He gives a description of three different approaches to the question of the essence of education. The first is the blind process of production of knowledge in contemporary capitalism. Next, two

diametrically opposed approaches to human nature and its capacity of education is discussed, the first is guided by the conviction that man is fundamentally defined by a lack, the other by the conviction that man is defined by creativity.

Kirsten Hyldgaard

Associate professor, *Danish School of Education*

Kirsten Hyldgaard sets out to analyse why research is regarded as more valuable than the task of teaching at the university. This leads her to question the role of education in society as such; why have institutions of teaching been a part of history for so long? Deploying theoretical psychoanalysis, she looks at education not as caused by some inner life force in man, but rather, as an anxious questioning originating in the frail individual's confrontation with the weight of culture.

Mladen Dolar

Senior research fellow in the Department of Philosophy, *University of Ljubljana*

In his contribution, Slovene philosopher Mladen Dolar answers a series of question sent to him by university activists from Copenhagen. Dolar points toward the internal contradictions of the modern university: How knowledge has overtaken the role that the master inhabited

in traditional societies, how the idea of democracy and the idea of science might be at odds, how the university is split between, on the one hand educating students towards professions and on the other doing research that dares to be out of touch with the ideas of its contemporary society.

Steen Ebbesen

Professor emeritus in classic and medieval literature,
Copenhagen university

In his text, originally delivered as his valedictory lecture after more than forty years of loyal service to the University, Steen Ebbesen presents the development and dissolution of the University as an institution, all the way from the Academy of Plato to the contemporary University of Copenhagen. In this way, he not only makes clear the history of the institution in all its glory and meticulous tragedy, but also the probable catastrophe of the present-day situation.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This anthology has been informed by a series of seminars held at Literaturhaus, Copenhagen, in which students, teachers and invited speakers discussed the situation of education today.

Bypassing regular chains of distribution, the book will be distributed free of charge and made directly available to anyone: students, educators and educational institutions that wish to arrange seminars or debates on the question of education.

The editors are all students at the University of Copenhagen or European Graduate School. The book has been conceived on the basis of their experiences with university politics and activism and years of study at these two very different educational institutions.

For more information:
www.whatiseducation.net

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PUBLIC USE OF REASON IN THE KITCHENS

Henrik Jøker Bjerre

In Immanuel Kant's distinction between the private and the public use of reason lies a key to some of the issues at stake in the contemporary debates on the future of the academy. In his essay on enlightenment from 1784, Kant defines the freedom to make public use of one's reason as the only absolutely necessary prerequisite for the progress of society:

For this enlightenment, however, nothing is required but freedom, and indeed the least harmful of anything that could even be called freedom: namely, the freedom to make public use of one's reason in all matters (Kant 1996: 18).

At first glance, the public use of reason appears only to concern the freedom of expression. If you have an opinion about how things are run, in the public sphere or at your own work place, you should be allowed to state this opinion publicly because this is the only way we can make sure that mistakes, malpractices, and incoherent ideas are

being challenged and overcome. Kant emphasizes that any sovereign should gladly welcome the public use of reason, because it corroborates a well-functioning state through gradual reform rather than sudden, dramatic revolutionary acts.

The term “public use of reason,” however, does not simply equal ‘free speech’ in the sense of everyone being allowed to say whatever he or she pleases. There is not much progress for humanity in listening to someone’s bigotry or immediate emotional impressions. The limits of free speech, in this sense, is not really what is on Kant’s mind at all. Rather, he makes an important distinction between the public use of reason and what he calls the “private use of reason,” which does not mean that which one says or does at home, in private, as opposed to outside or to many people. By the private use of reason, Kant means a use of reason “which one may make of it in a certain civil post or office with which [one] is entrusted” (ibid.). The “privacy,” thus, concerns how one performs one’s own specific role, administers the responsibility that one is entrusted, and, in general, does what one is supposed to do as a subject to maintain a decent life and function as a normal citizen. A policeman, for example, is entrusted with a certain mandate to regulate traffic or investigate a crime. This job has certain frames and regulations, which one must follow, and it is not up for grabs how you wish to

interpret these. You need good judgement and the ability to interpret situations and act on them appropriately, and your conduct must remain within the relevant laws and the order of command in the police force in question. Being a policeman, with all that it entails, is to make a private use of reason. You may serve the public in an important sense, but you are also doing as you are told and staying out of trouble, whilst receiving a salary and a certain kind of social status. You may disagree with your superiors and you may, at the right time and the right place, let them know that you disagree, but at the end of the day, you must follow orders. Kant is all for the private use of reason and maintains that it is an essential prerequisite for one to have a well-functioning society. If a (precisely) private soldier in the army starts arguing about the strategy in the middle of a battle, it immediately becomes dangerous. But the right of any soldier should nonetheless be maintained to publicly discuss the purpose and engagements of the military, when he or she is not directly on duty, and thus the right to (also) make a public use of reason. Sometimes, of course, the lines between the private and public use of reason can be difficult to draw, as e.g. in the cases of Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden (should one reveal secrets that may be important for the public, but can endanger colleagues; how can one determine when the interest of the public overrides legally established duties to the state and its institutions; when is the right moment for a

disclosure, etc.), but it is crucial to Kant that the public use of reason is always defended and developed.

What distinguishes Kant's concept of the public use of reason from the many contemporary debates on the freedom of expression is that it is based on a distinction between the powers one serves when speaking: Does one serve an external authority (employer, superior, elder, group, community) or does one serve reason itself — i.e., by the scrutiny and discussion of laws, practices, ideas — for the “mere” sake of *getting it right*? So, the question is, in fact, not so much one of my individual right to say whatever I please, but rather, one of which *use of reason* I am making when I say whatever I please. As already indicated, the public use of reason does not entail that one speaks to a lot of people, for example, or even that it takes place outside of one's home. One should just use one's reasoning capacities to further what is reasonable. Writing a letter to the editor could be a public use of reason, even though one is at home, alone, in the armchair. I would even argue that talking to one's friends or family could be a public use of reason, if what is at stake is the question of what is right and what is wrong. One might address someone in a bar as a member of “the entire public of the world of readers” (ibid.), as Kant puts it, and not as someone with a specific interest or inclination or power.

Kant's distinction creates a number of difficult questions: Can a private company make a public use of reason? Is a politician, who represents her party in a debate on TV, speaking on behalf of reason or on behalf of the party? How can we distinguish these? And is the journalist mediating the debate doing so on behalf of the general interest of the public as a world of readers or on behalf of the media that has employed her? Sometimes, especially in a hypermediated world of consumerism, celebrity culture and anti-intellectualism, it can seem like a naïve, romantic idea to insist on a "pure" public use of reason, and it is in a way rather easy to put any supposed instance of it in doubt. (Why do people speak at conferences or write articles about the purpose of education, for example? Do we really believe that we might do something to improve education or at least save some of the essential values of the enlightenment, or are we already speaking and writing only to improve CVs and satisfy the increasing demands from employers and politicians to demonstrate "social impact"?) Nonetheless, I would claim, the imperative of a public use of reason remains a fundamental principle of democracy. Giving up on it, even as something one might aspire to do, would mean a complete surrender to market forces, political cynicism or brute power. Even if one could put in doubt the motivation behind every singular case of public debate, publication, discussion, artwork, etc., the

mere belief in the public use of reason must be upheld in order to maintain belief in the very idea of a democracy.

We are, thus, approaching a problem very similar to the one of the categorical imperative itself: How can one be sure that a person (even oneself) is acting out of pure reverence to the moral law, and not out of some inclination secretly affecting one's motivational system? You assist a friend with his exam paper or help him dealing with a personal problem, but how can you be sure you are doing this for moral reasons and not because you have a crush on him — or, why not, because you get some personal satisfaction from the act of helping itself? One can always postulate an ulterior motive, and Kant himself readily admitted that it is impossible to give an empirical example of a moral act beyond any possible scepticism. As Alenka Zupančič has shown, however, the implications of this problem are often misunderstood. What is essential about the moral law is not how we can purify ourselves enough from any pathological inclination to be said to act in strict accordance with it, but, on the contrary, how a pure, formal principle (*act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law*) can have actual, real, tangible, “pathological” effects in our lives. The categorical imperative, Kant claimed, is a *Faktum der Vernunft*, an indisputable fact, and as such it is real. We all know the demand reason puts on us to act

morally, and the curious thing is that this law makes us do things, invent things and want things. The scepticism towards a pure moral act is therefore a case of bad infinity or a superego logic that always demands more evidence and is never satisfied, and it is easy to conclude that no one can in fact ever act morally. But to Zupančič the situation is precisely the opposite: We have something real (even in a Lacanian sense), namely the moral law, which affects our lives and which can make us perform acts that we would not have otherwise done.

The crucial question of Kantian ethics is thus not 'how can we eliminate all the pathological elements of will, so that only the pure form of duty remains?' but, rather, 'how can the pure form of duty itself function as a pathological element, that is, as an element capable of assuming the role of the driving force or incentive of our actions?' (Zupančič 2000: 15-16).

Something similar can be said about the public use of reason. Although it can, of course, be an interesting and important exercise to investigate one's own motives, as well as it is relevant to be aware of how different agents might be motivated by private motives in e.g. political or commercial contexts, it is much more important to invent, maintain, and experiment with forms of action

and institutions that create real effects out of the general ambition of a public use of reason. So, in the context of public discussion, other than a defence of the liberal principle of the freedom of expression, is it possible to create interventions that change the parameters of exchanges such that the public use of reason may be re-invented? I think creativity in this field is in fact badly needed in contemporary society. When public debate is becoming dominated by social media, promotion of pundits and opinion leaders, professionalization of political parties that almost makes them resemble private companies, complete with CEOs and PR-managers, when news media are depending more and more on advertising, or are controlled by narrow, political interests and restrictions — how can one re-create the voice of a public use of reason? How can one emancipate public discussion from the private interests of the participants?

In October 2010, the Danish artist Claus Beck-Nielsen made a radical attempt at emancipating himself from what one could broadly term the ideological state apparatuses, when he renounced his name and arranged his own funeral in absentia, such that his former identity and name could be buried. The project, entitled *funus imaginarium*, was supposed to investigate the conditions of escaping the identity, personal ID, etc. parcelled out to a person in the contemporary state, and possibly create a re-invigoration

of politics through a collective of subjects speaking only in their capacity of being human bodies.¹ Although very much an aesthetic experiment, I think the continued resistance (of the person today known as “Madame Nielsen”) against being subjected to the normal-pathological conditions of being a subject of the contemporary state does encourage more thought and experimentation toward the possibilities of creating a space for the public use of reason. The emancipation of the body formerly known as Claus Beck-Nielsen was in a sense a creation of a new voice, one that speaks from beyond identity in most of the ways we are accustomed to think about it. Something similar could be said about the ambitions of another Danish experiment on the problematic of enunciation in public debate, the Centre for Wild Analysis (CWA), although it does take much less radical measures in terms of personal commitment and destruction. The CWA is an experiment in the creation of a collective subject that speaks and intervenes in public debate on the background of no one particular personal identity. It is a collective of five philosophers which writes books, newspaper columns and gives lectures. For a year, the centre also hosted its own national radio program, which consisted mainly in an experiment to create hour-long conversations on philosophical topics. These were not exchanges of viewpoints, but rather investigations of themes, ideally spoken as if in one voice. One of the rules of the centre is that at least two of the members must be

present at the same time and place, in order for the centre to exist. Another, that the speakers cannot disagree. (If they do, they speak for themselves, and not for the centre).

On its homepage, the centre writes:

Public debate does not need more “unique” individual voices with exciting personal perspectives. Much more, it needs collective interventions that can make society start thinking itself, instead of referring everything to personal interests and backgrounds.²

A third example is what one could call the struggle to reclaim public space itself. Nina Power, in a lecture given in Aarhus in 2015, addressed the increasing exhaustion of material, public space, and saw the various social movements that have arisen over the past five years as attempts at a repossession of the very domain of the public. It is not enough to be able to “speak freely” and publish cartoons of the prophet if the space for public discussions and decision-making is simultaneously being exhausted by privatization and commercialization. Walking around London today, for example, is, according to Power, very much a walk through various private spheres and interests. Therefore, the many forms of “occupy” movements: Occupy Wall Street, occupy the city council squares, occupy the

universities should really be seen as very literal attempts to reclaim a space for free intellectual or political debate and decision-making. Public space means space owned by the public — and space, where you can address others as members of the “world of readers”, rather than as consumers or subjects of a state. So, one could say that while the psychological problematic of what and why one speaks, as one does, does remain, it is still possible to literally and materially create spaces where one is allowed and expected to speak on behalf of the public. Like in the case of the emancipated body of the artist formerly known as Claus Beck-Nielsen and the collective subject of the CWA, the question is one of inhabiting new forms of expression, by liberating territory, one could almost say: Declaring this body, this place, this structure, one for public use of reason. Again, the whole point is the inversion of the problematic from an epistemological to a practical one: When the cynic says that “oh, but everything is tainted, there *is* no pure interest of the common good”, the occupy movements respond by creating islands of public rationality, experimenting with forms of conversations, ways of showing approval, the human microphone, etc. When occupying the universities in 2014, for example, I think it was an extremely important and right move of the students in Aarhus and Copenhagen to have brought books with them to read and to have invited teachers to come to the blockade to talk on some topics, etc.

We already know about the invention of forms of promotion of the public use of reason from a series of institutionalized forms of the so-called arm's length principle. In arts, for example, it is common to have a particular distance between donors of stipends or projects and the end recipients of the funds. How precisely this is supposed to work (and how, for example, one avoids new forms of nepotism and corruption within a branch) is up for continued debate and experimentation, but the principle itself contains precisely the ambition of promoting independent forms of expression that are free to investigate, debate and criticise everything that the government or any other agent might do or opine. Institutionalizing and protecting free and experimenting voices that potentially speak against these very institutions themselves is a kind of (intelligent) self-reflective move of the state, very much in line with Kant's ideals for an active encouragement of a public use of reason. To paraphrase Evelyn Beatrice Hall's famous slogan (that is often attributed to Voltaire himself), "I disagree with you, but I will fight to death for your right to have your opinion", the arm's length principle says: "I disagree with you, but I will finance your right to disagree with me."

In the academic world, finally, we find something similar. The very idea of free research is precisely to create a space that is unregulated by government (or other "private")

interests (in Kant's sense), where researchers investigate any question that they themselves find worthwhile. The concept of academic freedom is very different from the concept of the freedom of expression in precisely this sense. While freedom of expression regards the right to speak one's opinion freely, academic freedom, to put it a bit bluntly, regards the right to corroborate, challenge, revise and improve one's opinion, which, among other things, takes time and costs money. A researcher might believe, for example, that Hegel's distinction between civil society and state throws some interesting light on current developments within welfare state institutions that encourage local engagement and volunteer community work; but if she does not have time and funding to investigate this hypothesis, it remains a rather limited contribution to public debate. Academic freedom is the freedom to (actually be able to) pursue the research that one finds important to pursue.

This emphasis on a broader understanding of the concept than what is implied by a "thin" concept of the absence of censorship is supported by another of Kant's texts. In his *The Conflict of the Faculties* from 1798, Kant identifies the philosophical faculty as the one that should remain independent from government interests, as opposed to the three "higher" faculties — medicine, law and theology — which are directly involved in the education of specialists and

officials who serve the interests of the state. There must be a fourth faculty, says Kant, that is guided by only scientific interest itself, i.e. by the search for truth, and where “reason is entitled to speak publicly.” For Kant, the public use of reason, I would claim, is most prominently taking place — or space — in the philosophical faculty. The absence of such a faculty would be damaging for the government itself, because truth would not come forward, says Kant. (Kant 1968: 282). It is in the government’s self-interest to maintain a philosophical faculty, but it is at arm’s length that the government must support this interest, in order for it to function optimally. Once again, the deciding factor for Kant is not the content or subject matter of what one is working with, but the interest on behalf of which one is working. The philosophical faculty, thus, relates to questions in both medicine, theology and law, and it comprises natural science, anthropology, logics, and other disciplines. It does not have its own field, but is a free investigation of the problems in and between any fields.

Wilhelm von Humboldt, 11 years after Kant’s essay on the conflicts of the faculties, emphasized that it is of paramount interest to a nation state to build and secure independent research and always treat science as “a not yet completed problem”.

As soon as one stops seeking the real science, or fancies that it does not have to be sought from the depth of the spirit, but that on the contrary it may be pieced together through quantitative measures of data collection, everything is irrevocably and forever lost; lost for science that, if this continues for a long time, will be deteriorated to such an extent that it leaves behind language as an empty shell; and furthermore lost for the state (Humboldt 1810: 2).

The state should never prescribe the right methods or objects of study to science, on pain of obfuscating its true purpose. Rather, the course of research should be decided from the inner necessity of research itself. If one should formulate a slogan for the classical, modern university in Kant's and Humboldt's outlook, it would be an expanded paraphrase of the famous slogan "*l'art pour l'art*": "science for science's sake — for society's sake."

Without going too deep into university history, I think it is interesting to notice that Copenhagen University had the classical division of faculties described by Kant from its foundation in 1479 until fairly recently. Only in 1850 were mathematics and natural science separated from the philosophical faculty, and it was as late as 1970 that the philosophical faculty itself was renamed to the

faculty of the humanities. This does of course not mean that critical thinking was suddenly abolished, but maybe this event was in fact more consequential than we are used to thinking. Defining a field of knowledge as that of the “humanities” (as opposed to technology, medicine, divinity, biology, etc.) tends to limit the field of interest and maybe even the forms of inquiry. One starts investigating human cultures, communication, aesthetics, languages, ethics, etc. rather than questioning the fundamental assumptions within any field, as well as the relation between them, and it becomes important to define one’s own specific areas of research in contrast to those of other branches or faculties. Soon, therefore, one starts defending oneself against the colonisation of one’s field from other specializations, as when neuroscience starts to explain moral concepts or when evolutionary biology claims to have found the key to horror literature (we are afraid of bogeymen, because we used to live on the savannah for a very long time, where tigers with big teeth posed very real threats to our existence). Against such attacks, humanities tend to emphasize the unary traits of their professions; the difference between scientific explanation and hermeneutical understanding, etc., which might often be justified, but nonetheless remains a defensive and separatist move.

But, worse still, maybe the compartmentalisation of the humanities has also quietly and largely unnoticed

prepared the “privatization” of them, to use Kant’s term, even against the original intentions of the “humanists” themselves. Ending up with its own particular fields of interest and modes of inquiry, the humanities have become vulnerable to the increasing emphasis on the utility of the knowledge that emerges from the universities, because the other fields produce more tangible outcomes. There is of course nothing wrong with knowledge being useful, but there is a certain irony to the fact that the remaining parts of the philosophical faculty of the classical university has ended up having to define its value in terms of the kinds of output that much more resembles the three “higher” faculties. To avoid the annihilation of the philosophical faculty, it has been transformed into a “higher” faculty, or to put it more brutally: a vocational school. When you look at the self-description of some of the humanistic faculties of Danish universities today, for example, the need for justification is rather evident. At Copenhagen University, the faculty itself defines the focal point of the humanist sciences as “the human dimension of development and innovation, social conditions and politics, language and communication, history and culture, arts and aesthetics, and modern media and technologies.”³ The object of study is the “human dimension”, and it seems obvious that one must therefore always include a humanist in research or business projects to understand the “human component”. Although such a description is maybe relatively innocent,

it is still interesting to notice how far away in fact it is from Kant's idea of a philosophical faculty. At Arts at Aarhus University, the faculty staff investigates "the cultural and social forms of expression and practice of the human being"⁴, which again sounds plausible, but is also a form of compartmentalisation and privatization (in Kant's sense); in this case it sounds rather like the study of something that could come in handy when the government wants to prevent the radicalization of young Muslims or design streets that are easy to patrol.

Now, I am not saying that we should not educate people who are good at communication, understand particular cultures, and can analyse complicated texts and revise mission statements in municipal administrations. Far from it. I consider this a central contribution especially of philosophy educations in an era of mass universities, but I do maintain two things:

First of all, that one of the primary qualities of a solid university education is not the knowledge of the particular field that you are specializing in, but much more the ability to dig into a field of knowledge and "break the code" of its most fundamental assumptions. In this sense, when there is no longer any separate "philosophical faculty," its purpose should be inscribed into the heart of any university education and research department.

Even if we want to educate “only” intelligent bureaucrats and competent workers in the information economy, we need to give them first of all a profoundly critical sense of their own field. Without this, they would not be able to contribute to innovation and critical reflection in any truly valuable sense. The crucial question of how to obtain a more genuine and solid foundation of one’s intellectual competences is what Ray Land has addressed in terms of what he calls “threshold concepts”: Concepts that open “a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something” (Land 2015: 18). Every discipline has one (in biology evolution; in literature deconstruction, etc.), and you only really get to know that field by embracing and understanding the ramifications of that concept. You get it, you have broken the code, when you understand the threshold concept, and after that you see the world differently in a fundamentally important sense. And maybe one could even go one step further: You only really understand a threshold concept (or maybe any concept), when you are also able to challenge it and potentially renew it. In any case: when students start losing the ability to grasp their threshold concepts, the meaning of higher education as such starts to evaporate. I think this concern could also be formulated in terms of the difference between knowledge and truth: You may acquire knowledge and communicate knowledge without being particularly concerned about or aware of the truth of that knowledge, but in order to “get

it”, to really understand the knowledge that you acquire, you have to see it in the light of truth. For example, you might know that in Russian a horse is called “loshad” and the president is called Putin (sometimes one gets the impression that “Putin” is in fact simply the Russian word for president), without being engaged in the critical examination of Russian culture, literature, traditions and politics. But only when you dive into the literature, music, politics, etc. will you be able to see the meaning of Putin in a genuinely interesting perspective. In this sense, university education has to be critical, which does not mean that you have to be “against” Putin. Criticism stems from the Greek verb “*krinein*”, which means to distinguish, separate or decide, and the critic (*kritikos*) is essentially simply the person who is “able to make judgments”. Therefore, even if universities are becoming more and more something like sophisticated forms of vocational colleges, their basic value and most essential characteristic remain the critical thinking of their staff and students. In times such as these, with cuts in funding and increased external pressure to accept the employability of the candidates as the only valid criterion for the relevance and success of education, it becomes even more important than ever to maintain and develop forms of teaching, supervision, examination and research projects that foster and nourish the critical dimension of whatever field one is working in. Or, put in terms of the distinction between the private and the public use of reason: Threshold

concepts can only be grasped by leaving behind the private use of reason. There is no “for what purpose” when one tries to understand the concept of deconstruction (*especially* the concept of deconstruction...).

Secondly, if humanist research concerns the “human component” of research projects, it becomes critical in a rather different sense from the Kantian idea of a public use of reason. In EU-projects, for example, we more and more see the role of the humanist researcher as the one that takes care of the “ethical issues” related to a specific problematic. You do research in a new method for gene manipulation of crops, for example, and you employ a small section of humanists to investigate the indigenous cultures on the farmland that is expected to be converted into GMO agriculture, or some of the concerns of the political consumer. But what you do not get is the integrated reflection of the very idea of gene manipulation as such, complete with detailed knowledge of biological processes, a philosophical approach to the relation between human and non-human actors, and a political and economic discussion of the implications and presuppositions involved (this is a hypothetical example and of course to some extent a caricature, but I think the concern is genuine). What we risk is something like the international agreements on the trade of e.g. fish quotas from African countries: You always have to allocate a small percentage for “local development projects” that ensure a

kind, ethical profile attached to the agreement — and then you are free to exploit their resources.

Additionally, I think there is a curious paradox related to the increasing external pressure on both teaching and research, namely that some, and often the most prestigious, of the research conducted is produced for a rather peculiar audience, which doesn't quite fit Kant's description of "a world of readers". With the increased focus on the teaching of a higher number of students at the lowest possible costs, simultaneous to an increase in the need for external funding for university research, we might be facing a division between those who teach students and those who do research (which goes straight against the intention of the ideal of research-based teaching in the Humboldt university), or maybe even between those who teach, those who engage with the public (companies, organisations, media, public lectures), and those who do research. In terms of what this means for research, my worry is not so much that some researchers do not "communicate their findings," as it is sometimes insisted that they must. I think basic fundamental research aiming only and directly at the truth remains a completely honourable and vital task for academia, regardless of the communicative skills of the people involved in it. However, the separation of research, teaching and communication might have another consequence that is not so innocent. To exaggerate a bit:

Teachers who do survey lectures and prepare students for problem solving in their future vocation; communicators who contribute by entertaining and giving expert advice; and researchers who publish their work in closed circles and journals inaccessible to the public in more than one sense. I move here into some more speculative remarks, but I do it nonetheless in seriousness. And there is a concept invented by German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk that I cannot resist employing here to highlight the principal problem.

Sloterdijk refers to the famous concept of the “implicit reader” which was described by literary scholar Wolfgang Iser. According to Iser, a text, and most prominently a literary text, always relies on a liaison between itself and the reader in order to function at all. Filling the “gaps” in the text, or even the move from one sentence to the next, requires an active participation on behalf of the reader. You imagine one of the many possible meanings the text might have and this interpretation is continuously revised throughout the reading. The process of imagination, interpretation and re-interpretation gives life to the text and without this it would not mean what it actually means (although this “actual meaning” thus varies from reader to reader, and even when the same reader reads the text again). The term “implied reader,” according to Iser, “incorporates both the pre-structuring of the potential meaning by the text, and the reader’s actualization of this potential meaning through

the reading process” (Iser 1974: xii). A reader is always implied in a novel (and other texts) and is part of the very composition of a text.

What Sloterdijk adds to this analysis is that today, he says, we must acknowledge that what most characterizes a very large quantity of academic texts, is the fact that they are never or scarcely ever read by anyone. This is Sloterdijk:

No academic will deny it. It is time to expand the theory of the implicit reader by the theory of the implicit non-reader. It seems to be a fair estimate that 98 to 99 percent of all academic text production is written with the justified or unjustified expectation of its partial or complete not-being-read [*Nichtgelesenwerden*]. It would be illusory to assume that this could take place without some retroactive effect on the ethics of the author.” (Sloterdijk 2011, my translation).

Sloterdijk’s point is related to the increasing problem of plagiarism in academic research (and he is referring to contemporary prominent scandals in German public and political life). If the expectations are that no one will ever really read what one writes, it seems a relatively small step to add a few paragraphs here and there that were borrowed from someone else. This is serious enough, if it is true

(in fact, there is a certain tragic irony to the fact that one of the more recent measures taken in the universities to combat plagiarism is — to have *computers* scan student papers for passages overlapping with other sources. The implicit reader of university papers thus becoming a robot...).

However, I think there is another implication of Sloterdijk's observation which may be a bit more elusive, but is nonetheless worth some consideration. If a text is being written with the expectation of its (largely) not-being-read, what does this imply for its relation to the distinction between the public and private use of reason? In fact, one very common attitude towards the publication of articles is that it is something one must do in order to improve one's CV or fulfil the quota of one's institute. Although it is of course somewhat cynical to adopt a purely instrumental approach to the publication of scientific work, it is also a very real and down-to-earth economic reality for heads of department around the world that a certain amount of points must be collected and especially for upcoming academics that they need to document a decent rate of publication. In other words, the private use of reason is a very obvious, I would even say objective, part of academic publishing today. Does this mean that such work is necessarily uncritical? It probably does not. But it does mean that the power that one is serving is to a significant degree something other than reason/truth/science itself.

Overall, there are several tendencies that create what I would call the “privatization of the universities,” which does not mean that they are being sold or run by private companies, but that their *raison d'être* is increasingly moving toward what Kant defined as the private use of reason. These include the compartmentalization of the humanities, the new public management of the universities in terms of evaluation, quantification, and externally defined purposes for both research and teaching, and the increasing separation of research, teaching and communication of science.

So, what to do? Although it does probably seem a bit *altnodisch*, I would first of all insist on a certain academic ethos to be maintained and promoted in the universities. Researchers and teachers must insist on the critical impetus of university education, promote the independent thinking of their students, and encourage them to think, rather than merely learn various forms of know-how and know-that. Obvious, as this may seem, this imperative forces us to constantly reflect on and rethink how we can accommodate it when demands for employability and instrumentalization of knowledge are constantly increased while the time for studying is being reduced.

Secondly, I think we might have to become more inventive in a more substantial sense as well. We may even have to

prepare for some rather rough conditions. The political climate does not show many signs of slowing down the attack on the public use of reason. There are certainly still traditional, old school academic spaces, but I am worried that such places are increasingly becoming more elitist educations and that the conditions for creating and practicing the public use of reason in the mass university will deteriorate even more. So, maybe we have to invent entirely new spaces. At the first conference in the Academy Group, held at Copenhagen University in 2013,⁵ some of us ended up discussing the necessity and possibility of establishing networks of what we called “kitchen philosophy”. We saw the need for new forms of academic work and exchange, and started to wonder whether these might have to be invented outside the university in the near future. Some initiatives followed from the conference but the idea has still not been fully developed. (Maybe the necessity has not yet become grave enough). The idea was that independent thinking has come under such pressure that we might have to literally move out of the campuses to secure spaces for it. The image of such spaces that we came up with was that of the kitchen, because the kitchen played a central role in a place where the public use of reason had precisely suffered immensely: post-Stalin Soviet Union. Here, people started gathering in their kitchens to discuss politics, exchange jokes, play music, and thus a whole, separate culture emanated from these kitchens — complete

with kitchen recordings and kitchen publications. The so-called *samizdat* were self-published books or documents circulated via the kitchens. And in the kitchens one would read and discuss the stories that were not allowed outside, in the public sphere. In the words of one Russian poet:

One of the reasons why kitchen culture developed in Russia is because there were no places to meet. You couldn't have political discussions in public, at your workplace. You couldn't go to cafes — they were state-owned. The kitchen became the place where Russian culture kept living, untouched by the regime.⁶

So, in the Soviet kitchens we have maybe the purest example of how the public use of reason can take place outside the view of public order or public space in the usual sense of that term. Does it mean that one should compare the Bologna process to the Soviet system and that I claim that we are only free to speak our mind in our own kitchens? No. Again, the point is the opposite: The case of the Soviet kitchens shows us how any space can be occupied and liberated for the public use of reason. Repeating the invention of the Soviet kitchens does not necessarily mean repeating the precise arrangement of sitting in our kitchens, playing guitars and smoking cigarettes, nor does it imply that the way public use of

reason was suffering then can be compared directly to the way it is suffering now. It means repeating its gesture, its sense of urgency and its insistence on the practice of a public use of reason, even where it seems most unlikely. Maybe we just need to supplement our standard curricula in the universities for now: arrange voluntary reading sessions, choose unheard of topics for conferences, take academic thinking to the streets, occupy spaces, publish articles for free online, and so on. There are even ways to turn the obsession with quantifiable outputs against the administrative regime of New Public Management itself, as Timon Beyes has suggested. Its arrogant disregard for theory and academic content can in some cases be exploited by filling the lessons and textbooks with outrageously theoretical and independent contents, as long as the numbers are still officially adding up. But maybe, as such practices become more desperate and demand more and more unpaid labour by teachers and students, we should also use this inspiration to imagine new forms of networks and interactions, maybe even new institutions outside the frames of traditional academia.

- 1 The event was analyzed and discussed in a subsequent conference, the proceedings of which have been published in (Das Beckwerk 2011).
- 2 www.centerforvildanalyse.dk
- 3 www.hum.ku.dk/omfakultetet
- 4 www.arts.au.dk
- 5 "How to facilitate the great academy?," Copenhagen University, October 10-13, 2013.
- 6 www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2014/-05/27/314961287/how-soviet-kitchens-became-hotbeds-of-dissent-and-culture

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THE VOCATION OF THE PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

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I will be reflecting this evening on the *vocation* of the public university in the twenty-first century. The theoretical well-spring for these reflections is Max Weber's thinking about vocations developed in his well-known lectures, "Science as a Vocation" and "Politics as a Vocation." Weber delivered the lectures just a little over a year apart — in November 1917 and January 1919 — at the behest of a left-liberal student organization at the University of Munich. In them, he examines the conditions, motivations, purposes and ethics contouring lives dedicated to scholarly knowledge and to politics in his time. His examination centered on *Beruf*, translated into English as vocation but, in the original German, signifying both calling and profession.¹

Weber understood the distinctly Protestant notion of "calling" or *Berufung*, as something originally given by God and through which individuals serve divine purpose on earth.² Transmuted into secular or even atheistic terms, as

it would have been for Weber, a calling retains the quality of emanating from the soul or at least somewhere deep within, of serving a cause greater than need satisfaction, and of appropriately hewing to an ethic distinctive to the realm in which it is practiced. Politics as a calling is in this way contrasted by Weber with politics as something one might do for a living but also with politics engaged in for sport, vanity, thrills or sheer love of power, and with politics pursued irresponsibly, without attunement to the particular qualities of political life — that is, power, violence and effects of action inevitably exceed its animating motives (Weber, *Politics*, 40, 76-92). Similarly, *Wissenschaft*, science in the German sense of scholarly inquiry and knowledge, is contrasted by Weber with polemicizing, preaching, advocacy or political organizing, and with research or teaching contoured by anything other than “plain intellectual integrity”—the pursuit of objective knowledge and sober consideration of the implications of various moral or political principles (Weber, *Science*, 19-27, 31).

For Weber, having a genuine vocation for something means being compelled by and dedicated to the activity’s worldly value combined with a willingness to navigate and withstand often miserable conditions or rewards for pursuing it. Being animated by a calling is precisely the opposite of an egoistic or self-benefiting pursuit. Further,

Weber's account of political leadership and scholarly inquiry involved bringing into relief how beset and even imperiled both endeavors were in his time, and how small the possibilities were for recognition or success in either domain. This led him to formulate the calling for politics and scholarship as requiring a capacity to simultaneously reckon with and resist these conditions — facing them squarely without submitting to them. The sobriety, maturity and asceticism he established as comprising the ethic appropriate to each extends, then, even to their uptake; those seeking glory, glamour, wealth, certainty of success or simple gratification should look elsewhere.

Weber also analyzes both vocations in the context of an increasingly ubiquitous instrumental rationality in modernity, a form of reason and reasoning that he understood to gradually strip everything in the world — including knowledge and politics — of meaning and purpose as it converted human endeavor to ubiquitous instrumentalism without end or ends. (Weber, *Science*, 28-30; *Politics*, 54, 62, 66, 71, 75) And yet, with the very idea of vocation, Weber aims to move against this destruction of meaning and purpose... both in the world and in the specific fields of activity he is analyzing. More than merely withstanding difficult conditions, vocations are Weber's bid to recover something of what the age, according to him, is vanquishing — ardent passion for inordinately

difficult and potentially world-changing endeavor and a deep sense of responsibility in following this passion (Weber, *Politics* 76-7; *Science*, 31). Vocations are also his bid to contest contingent developments within the fields he is analyzing — corruption, politicization and routinization — as well as developments each field inherently generates — disenchantment of the world by science, and unprecedented machineries of domination (bureaucracy and capitalism) in politics.

There is, then, both sober idealism and *amor fati* in Weber's thinking about vocations, both a steely eyed confrontation with existing conditions and a forceful rejection of them as determinant. These are the coordinates I want to draw upon for thinking about the vocation of the university in the twenty-first century. Weber is uniquely attuned to the importance and the challenges of vocations in potentially rescuing noble fields of human endeavor from destructive tendencies imminent within the fields themselves and from toxic forces of the age. This makes him a vital intellectual companion in developing the calling and the attendant ethos of the public university today, particularly given its imperiled state.



We begin by marking the counter-intuitive meaning of *vocation* in the educational context today, where the term

has come to signify job training as opposed to other kinds of learning and human development. In both secondary and tertiary institutions, vocational education refers to what were classically termed mechanical arts (*artes mechanicae*, considered appropriate for unfree men), as opposed to the liberal arts (*artes liberales*, considered essential for free human beings to exercise their freedom). Even when the United States Morrill Act of 1862 struck a compromise between the vocational and liberal arts, as it founded scores of land grant colleges for the education of non-elites, the Act itself specified that concern with developing practical knowledge must not supplant but rather supplement “research and education in the liberal arts for the industrial classes.”³ The etymological irony we face today, as we will see, is that the contemporary vocation of the public university is precisely opposite to the new forms of vocational training it is being externally pressured to offer.

In addition to minding the etymological tensions, we need to mark the difficulties of shifting from an individual to an institutional register in considering *Beruf*. What does it mean to say an institution has a vocation in the Weberian sense? To imbue it with a secularized version of a divine calling? Far from contradictory, I will argue that discerning, articulating and culturing the vocation of universities has rarely been so important... or neglected.

More than a mission, and certainly the opposite of a brand, logo, motto or ranking, a careful and strongly iterated vocation would fill every fiber of universities with dedication to worldly purposes. This is all that will prevent them from becoming complicit in a time and world increasingly voided of such purposes and voided too of thoughtful, educated democratic human beings. It is all that will prevent them from becoming handmaidens in replacing democracy with plutocracy, technocracy and autocracy, and in elevating capital appreciation — human, corporate or financial — as the value governing all entities large and small. If we turn back to Weber's two lectures now, we will see how this goes.

“Politics as a Vocation” and “Science as a Vocation” share an organizational and rhetorical arc. Both begin by mapping the abysmal contemporary conditions of each field and the meager chances for gratification offered to those endeavoring in them. Modern politics Weber describes as organized by machines, guilds, parties, as shot through with commercialization and corruption, and as dominated by the apparatuses of bureaucracy and capitalism. These features, combined with the requirement that contemporary leaders have mass demagogic appeal, mean that anyone with a talent for political leadership will find it difficult both to realize their aims and to maintain their integrity (Weber, *Politics*, 75-6). The pursuit of a scholarly vocation presents a different and more complex set of problems.

First, its organization by patriarchal guilds in Germany prevents meritocracy and tends instead to reward slavish mediocrity (Weber, *Science*, 4-5). Second, science does not and cannot deliver meaning to a world increasingly voided of it; rather, the pursuit of objective knowledge desacralizes as it demystifies its objects of study, whether religion or biology, history or physics. Abetting this nihilism is the unbreachable requirement that scholars submit all values, convictions and principles to analytic scrutiny, treating them not as sacred or fundamental but as testable positions with implications and consequences. Finally, consequent to the progressive nature of knowledge formation, every knowledge discovery is destined to be eclipsed; there are no final or permanent truths in scientific paradigms of knowledge (Weber, *Science*, 11). *Wissenschaft* understood on a progressive and objectivist model thus paradoxically erases truth even as it presses toward truth. In sum, science necessarily evacuates the scientist from the work, the work itself is constantly overcome by and in time, and worldly meaning is eviscerated by the work. Commitment to *Wissenschaft* is a commitment to oblation — the emptying out of the world, truth and self.

For Weber, the combination of these existential and historically specific contexts of the two vocations shapes the ethical bearing appropriate to each. Following his lengthy discussion of conditions, he articulates what he calls the

currency or “lifeblood” of each domain — power and violence for politics, truth for science. (It is significant for Weber that, pace Nietzsche, whom he read closely, power and truth are diametrically opposed and mutually contaminating. This establishes the ethical necessity of keeping the domains of science and politics radically separated: politics in the classroom is as unethical as are supervenient principles or totalitarian truths in politics.) Weber turns finally to the ethos and ethics of each vocation, which are determined by both the conditions and the currency of the domain. His famous insistence on an “ethics of neutrality” for professors, and an “ethics of responsibility” for political actors, is born of each activity’s endemic features but honed by the specific challenges of the present (Weber, *Science*, 19-25; *Politics*, 79-92).

At the heart of both ethics is relentless responsibility for the effects, intended and inadvertent, of one’s conduct in the sea of powers contextualizing each endeavor. This responsibility is no abstract care for the world, but highly concrete. Attention to milieu, to chains of consequences, and to the vulnerability of innocents are all part of it: there is, for Weber, no room for “oops!” in politics and no room for Socratic tricks or charisma in the classroom. Responsibility in each domain is also stipulated by two very different chains of opposites: vanity, profiteering, corruption and power-mongering on the one hand; and

recklessness, illusion, idealism inappropriate to context, exploitation of the powerless and collateral damage on the other. The first comprises the sin of narcissism and self-indulgence, the second of failure to grasp the nature and currency of the domain. The ethic of responsibility Weber builds for each vocation simultaneously shapes commitment, animates conduct, and establishes restraint.

Let us now gather up what we want to borrow from Weber as we think about the vocation of universities today. First, vocation itself is a calling featuring passion and sobriety *vis a vis* a particular field of endeavor and resting on an ethos specific to that field. Second, while having certain enduring, transhistorical qualities, vocation is always carved against historically specific conditions with which it must comport and yet which it also must resist: the task is to face and navigate these conditions without submitting to them, becoming a cog in their machineries. Third, almost everything in modern life threatens to derail or corrupt august human vocations. Articulating and protecting vocations matters because both the concept and the practice of vocations are so imperiled by the disappearance of substantive values in a world ordered by rationalization, bureaucracy and capitalism. Fourth, without animation by vocation, the activity at stake is worthless or worse. There is no reason to be in politics without a cause, without the yearning to have one's hand "on the wheel of history,"

even as one may fail and even as one bears ceaseless responsibility for everything unleashed, intentional or not, in pursuit of this cause. There is no reason to be a scholar without passion for truth and understanding, even as this passion will neither yield meaning nor principles by which to live. Let us now see how we might draw from Weber's appreciation of the importance of vocations, and his formulation of their requirements, to frame the predicaments and possibilities of the public university today.



Following Weber, we inaugurate our thinking about the vocation of the twenty-first century university by considering its current conditions. It is a commonplace that the last three decades have featured a steady submission of universities to business models, metrics and practices, a process that has all but eliminated the moat that for centuries kept universities modestly apart from markets, if not from churches and royal courts. The familiar formulation here is that of neoliberal *privatization*: universities have undergone a sharp transformation from public goods supported by public funding to private investments supported by a combination of student tuition, philanthropic donors, corporate investors and public-private partnerships.⁴ This transformation has meant a number of things:

First, the principles of value governing almost every dimension of the privatized public university are now

capital appreciation and capacity to attract new investors.⁵ The public model was dedicated to building a professional work force, to be sure, but also to educating citizens for democracies and conducting research in the public interest. Privatization tends to drain the latter purposes from universities for the obvious reason that the new revenue streams carry private rather than public purposes. These purposes push everything about curriculums, programs, pedagogy, learning, and research toward return on privately made investments, a concern driven by students, investors, families, and institutional governance alike. Once they have become reliant on private rather than public monies, it is nearly impossible for privatized public universities to culture the purposes of a well-educated democracy or of research on public problems... though they may continue to brand themselves with these things in a competitive market where they no longer have enormous price advantage over private institutions. Thus, precisely when democracy is deeply imperiled from other sources, and requires knowledge and intellectual tools for fathoming the unprecedented complexities of the world, privatized higher education withdraws from this mission.

Second, the skyrocketing tuition rates of privatized public universities generates new access models that re-stratify societies for which higher education was a mode of generating upward mobility through equality of opportunity

across class divides. Instead of a universal right that tempers these divides, education becomes an intensifier of inequality as it becomes the private investment of those who either have means or are willing or able to gamble with debt. Debt becomes its own driving force, of course, bending both curricula and student conduct sharply toward income-generating concerns and thus further marketizing the subject, including the subject of learning.⁶

Third, privatization breaks apart teaching and research, decreasing the value of the former for scholars and graduate programs, which means outsourcing teaching to marginally paid, insecure, devalued adjuncts. Of course this shrinks academic job markets, which compresses graduate programs and makes them ever more dependent on outside donors, which in turn reduces their scholarly independence. Meanwhile, researchers and research programs are increasingly pressed to search out private funds, which means foregrounding commercial and applied inquiry. This in turn depreciates basic research and open-ended critical inquiry across all fields, and especially depresses the value of the arts and humanities. Campuses increasingly become publicly subsidized research plants for commercial undertakings, even as most in universities mistakenly believe the opposite, namely that private monies support university undertakings rather than drain them.⁷

There is much more to be said about the political economic transformations of public universities over the past three decades but in order to properly contextualize the question of vocation, we need to address a second feature of the age, namely *financialization*, which can be understood as an inadvertent outgrowth of neoliberalization though it is far from identical with it.⁸ While the original meaning of financialization was simply conversion of an asset into a financial instrument, e.g., the conversion of expected future earnings into a home mortgage, financialization now also designates the dramatic recent growth and importance of the financial sector — banking, asset management, insurance, venture capital and derivatives — relative to the economy as a whole. Like neoliberalism and privatization, however, the effects of financialization vastly exceed the economic sphere. The financialization of capitalist economies since the 1970s has radically transformed almost every feature of contemporary societies, including the nature of conduct, incentive and value for human beings, social institutions, states, business and labor.

Most importantly, financialization generates economies and economic entities driven by shareholder value and not only by profit. It transforms what was, in an earlier iteration of neoliberalism, entrepreneurial and consumer conduct into investor and investee conduct, and it does this across every feature of organizations and human

existence.⁹ For investors, financialization shifts concern from profit and price to concern with the future value of the investment; for investees — the object of investment — it alters practices from concern with attracting customers at prices that exceed costs to concern with attracting investors who in turn increase the value of the stock and hence the firm. With these fundamental shifts, privatizing public universities in a financialized era entails more than replacing public with private funds and rationalizing higher education according to value for money. It entails more than importing business practices and metrics into every fiber of the university. Certainly these things have occurred and are consequential. However, with financialization, universities, like everything else, are less governed by return on investment or “the bottom line” than by their attractiveness to investors — students, faculty, donors, partners, creditors, even states. This attractiveness is registered by a plethora of rankings and ratings with which universities and every program and niche within them are therefore necessarily obsessed.

Let me explain briefly. Shareholder value — the value of one’s investment in a particular entity based on the speculative future of this value as determined by markets — is not equivalent to profit and is not determined by profitability. This is clear enough from the frequent divergence between a company’s posted earnings and its stock price.

Amazon can post losses but see its stock jump. Uber can be “worth” 50 billion while only losing money — it is living off its investors, who are speculating about its future, and doing so in part by speculating about others’ speculations about its future. In the stock market — the theater of financialized publicly owned corporations — firms are valued according to a great range of tangibles and intangibles including how the company is run; what it has just acquired or divested from; its perceived risk exposure; who is bidding to take it over; who its new competitors are or might be; how certain gambles with products and pricing are regarded by the industry; what future product lines it claims to be developing; what reputational advantage or damage it may be undergoing; what new market share it looks likely to acquire, and more. This great array of factors determining “value” makes clear that what matters is not a firm’s bottom line but calculated speculation about its capacity to enhance shareholder value in the future. What matters is *the market’s assessment* of a company’s future, an assessment that is based on speculators’ beliefs or guesses about that future. Above all, what determines share price in the present is would-be-investors’ beliefs about other would-be investors’ beliefs about the future of a particular stock.¹⁰

Shareholder value — so different from the kind of value Marx charted in Volume One of *Capital* — while emanating

from the stock market, has spilled into every dimension of contemporary existence. As any savvy college applicant, head of a start-up, or university development officer can tell you, what is crucial today is not their revenue/expenses ledger. Rather, what is decisive is their credible capacity to attract investors based on the market's assessment of the predicted future value of what one is or might become. In a financialized world, this is equally true for educational institutions, research sites, apps, consulting firms, individuals and large corporations. And it is why branding, reputation, and above, all, *ratings*, have become so important to every entity and endeavor... from the local dry cleaner to the local newspaper, from an Airbnb host to Wells Fargo, from the city of Chicago to Boeing, from a law school to a nation teetering on the brink of economic collapse.

The great shift from corporate capitalism to financialized capitalism, from concern with profit margins to concern with shareholder value, has revolutionized universities which, *as they have been neoliberalized and privatized*, have adopted the governance practices, metrics, pre-occupations and imperatives of financialization. As a financialized economy and culture generates ratings for investor calculations in everything (which is why every purchase you make, service you obtain, and experience you have is surveyed and ranked today), ratings have not merely proliferated in academic life but have come to

*govern each part of it.*¹¹ There are rankings of whole academic institutions, of course, as well as rankings of departments, institutes and scholars. There are rankings of graduate programs and rankings of subfields within them. There are job placement, publication, citation and post-graduate income ratings. There are ratings for “network advantage” — what students gain from rubbing shoulders with one group of fellow investors rather than another, say from Harvard rather than CUNY, Oxford rather than Birkbeck. There are bond ratings for public institutional borrowers, essential to every university’s capital building projects but now also driving their tuition increase schedules.¹² For undergraduates, there are ratings for campus dining halls, housing, recreation facilities, cultural and social life, political values, student services and, of course, professors.

The steadily growing importance of ratings in conditioning every decision, revision and allocation in university life means that shareholder capitalism transforms who and what governs the university, as well as what it is for. The result is profound mission confusion in both the research and educational arms of universities, and a radical de-linking of the two since they are governed by different investor groups. Indeed, the quaint faculty insistence that they are related refers to a university holism dis-integrated by shareholder capitalism and the “nexus of contracts” model of corporations by which financialization was ushered into

the corporate world. More than simply dividing teaching from research, and disorienting the aim or purpose of both, however, ratings and rankings increasingly shape every aspect of universities: student ethos and conduct; pedagogy; curriculum design and offerings; hiring and promotion of faculty; programs developed, nourished or abandoned; fields of study and lines of research developed or dropped; university partnerships and the programs they generate; and levels of regard (or disdain) for ourselves and our colleagues.

Disciplines themselves are increasingly private niche industries with their own ratings and ratings agencies. In an increasing number of disciplines there are ratings of individual scholars; these are determined by “published research impact,” which is determined by citations in ranked journals, all of which is a reminder that this order of value is generated by expectations about others’ expectations about what is and will have value in the future. That is, the value of a scholar, indexed by citations, is linked to the value of publication venues, which is generated by an ensemble of ratings comprising journal “impact factor” (citations, library acquisitions, hits and downloads, etc.) which in turn is largely driven by the valuation of the journal by the leading (highly ranked) members of the profession, and has precisely nothing to do with anything we might quaintly call the actual value of the journal or the scholarship to the world.¹³

Governance of disciplines, scholars and scholarship by rankings discourages research engaged with public problems or written for an educated public as opposed to research valued by the disciplines, its journals, and its rating agencies. Disciplinary rankings also deter creative interdisciplinarity, so essential for our times and its problem. For example, it is not possible to address the multiple crises besetting the European Union without linking approaches and insights from economics, politics, sociology, religion and geography. We cannot address the scandalous warehousing of humanity in urban and suburban shantytowns without drawing from economics, politics, sociology, geography, urban studies, anthropology and public health. The prospects for effective approaches to mitigating climate change require drawing from international relations, climate science, social psychology, domestic political analysis, public policy and political economy. Yet scholars who work across several disciplines tend to be less read and cited within their disciplines, and hence to be highly ranked, than scholars who work inside disciplinary confines. This has a cascading effect: graduate students and young scholars are discouraged from such work, hence not trained to do it, and the prospects of breaking down disciplinary silos becomes ever more remote.

Perhaps the most serious casualty of being governed by rankings, however, rests in undergraduate education.

Universities formerly devoted to developing worldly and educated human beings become sites for developing human capital, measured especially by post-graduate job placement and income levels. Being governed by these rankings is at odds with the cultivation of classrooms, curriculums and student orientation toward exploring meaning, the nature of knowledge, the condition of the world, human relations or the human spirit, or coordinates of existence different from those of the status quo. At the same time, in addition to return on investment, universities are measured by other rankings that lead to misbegotten priorities and often near-corrupt practices. These include rankings of competitiveness that lead institutions to try to boost applicant rates (so they can have a higher score for being competitive) and boost test scores, even as both practices are widely acknowledged as deleterious for students themselves. These also include rankings that drive the building of ever more elaborate recreational facilities, glamorous dorms, food courts and student services, while resources for education and research are steadily compressed.

In short, if universities are no longer 'cities on a hill' due to privatization and financialization, they have not been pulled from their cloistered worlds into more public purposes. To the contrary, as their every function becomes indexed and governed by a financialized order of value in which investor confidence and expectations dictate

survival or failure, they become steadily less oriented to research or teaching in the public interest, less able to set their own course, less organized by a clearly focused purpose and more bound to a set of drives that are often unjustifiable by any measure other than the rankings and, as is generally the case in financial markets, not even good indices of institutional health or productivity. The ratings by which they are governed generate neither priorities nor efficiencies that comport with rational institutional aims, let alone with that to which we now turn, the vocation of the public university in the twenty first century.



Let me compress the argument made to this point. Consequent to the particular time when public universities underwent their transformation by privatization, a time featuring ubiquitous financialization, universities are governed less by old fashioned utilitarian principles of cost/benefit (for internal allocations and for consumers) than by principles and metrics of shareholder value. The conversion of universities from public to private purposes, in both research and education, has been shaped both by the demands that accompany private funding and by governance driven by the ratings accompanying financialization. The combination has not only drawn universities away from public purposes but has generated deep irrationalities in university organizing dynamics and

priorities. Neoliberal privatization *along with* financialization constitutes the fundamental condition of public universities today. Following Weber, this condition is the context through which we should consider the vocation of the public university today.

I believe this vocation has two basic features in the twenty-first century. The first is *research and education oriented to worldly predicaments and challenges*. Examples of such predicaments include the unprecedented transnational powers and forces — political, social, cultural, discursive, economic — that have been humanly created but are not humanly controlled; global integration and the dangerous interregnum that globalization generates between nation-states and their successor form; stratification and strife along economic, cultural, religious, racial, gendered and other lines... ever-increasing global inequalities and volatilities related to them; climate change, resource depletion, species destruction, and unsustainably organized geographies and demographics that both perpetuate these problems and deter reckoning with them; human bodies that can be kept alive but without adequate conditions for their care or their thriving; diseases challenging the well-being or survival of entire populations and regions; widespread existential and political anxiety and fear, with its profound, social, psychological, political and theological effects; the difficulty of finding economic and political forms that both acknowledge a globally

connected world and provide the possibility of local self-determination and democracy.

The list above is a bare beginning, far from comprehensive. The point of inaugurating it is to imagine a university oriented by worldly cries, perils and needs, and to imagine the research and education — basic and specialized, humanistic and technical, big picture and local — that would be responsive to these cries, perils and needs. This focus contrasts with research and education contoured by the aim of human capital appreciation (in students or faculty) and the shareholder value of departments, programs or whole institutions. It concentrates instead on the predicaments identified with planetary and species survival, with the disintegration or usurpation of democracies, with minimally decent and modestly egalitarian and free forms of human existence, and on the knowledges needed to fathom, historicize, probe, narrate, illustrate and address these things.

This kind of education and research spans almost all the knowledges currently featured in research universities: technical, professional, scientific, social, humanistic and aesthetic. Far from being a mandate to focus universities on technical solutions to grave worldly problems, the claim here is the opposite. This aspect of the public university's vocation comprises examination of the epistemological and ontological assumptions securing the existing orders of things as natural and inevitable; analysis of the grammars,

representations and methods that secure this givenness; inquiry into how different orders of knowledge are valorized or discredited, elevated or buried; study of diverse and contested formulations of religion, culture, gender, race, caste and sexuality; exploration of the foundations and content of various humanisms and posthumanisms, natural histories, ecologies, cosmologies and more. Thus, work on Aristotle, Darwin or Chakrabarty, on colonialism and sexual divisions of labor, on various iterations of markets and their alternatives, on history and reading practices, and on poetry and music, are as important as work on solar and wind energy technologies, sustainable cities, cancer cures, food sovereignty, or the precise mechanisms by which technocracy, autocracy and plutocracy are usurping democracy in this century. The particular disciplines, subjects and topics are not decisive in determining whether this aspect of the vocation of the university is activated and realized. What matters is the calling, purpose and ethos by which curricula and research are animated and organized.

Put somewhat differently, if public universities are not only to survive but contribute to the public world — which they are bound to do by virtue of being public — university research and teaching cannot be *subordinated* to the kinds of knowledge needed by current economic and political regimes. This is not to say that all public university inquiry must be critical, only that it must be *uncontracted*, that

it must operate at a modest distance from the dominant interests of those regimes and also must aim at worldly problems rather than mainly at immediate commercial or state applications. Such uncontracted knowledge, until recently embodied in the *relative* autonomy of universities from markets and politics, is what privatization and financialization threaten in governing the conduct of students, faculty, donors and even taxpayers today and in their organization and governance of universities themselves. In fields ranging from forestry to physics, engineering to economics, literature to neurophysiology; and on issues ranging from climate change to the rise of nonstate terror, university research and teaching holds inordinate potential through its generation of publicly oriented research and its education of citizens. This generativity, however, is at odds with being held hostage to markets.

Developing and teaching publicly oriented knowledge is, then, one aspect of the vocation of public universities today. The second is bringing the outsiders in. Public universities must be consummately dedicated to educating and including in their research ranks those historically excluded by virtue of caste, class, religion, region, race, ethnicity, gender, and body. Why? Not only to redress historical hierarchies, dispossessions and prejudice. Not only to make the university a significant venue and vehicle (again) for overcoming disparities in opportunities for those on the wrong side of social hierarchies and

exclusions. Not only to intellectually and socially integrate those who otherwise become candidates for hostility to stable, equitable societies. Not only to develop knowledges that challenge dominant perspectives with knowledge from dispossession or exclusion, knowledge focused on sites and scenes of existence often occluded by dominant perspectives or paradigms. This aspect of the public university vocation is animated by all four of these: historical rectification and repair, equality of opportunity, social inclusion and incorporation, and democratic and diverse knowledge production. It is animated by equal opportunity combined with true (rather than rigged) meritocracy, yet is also an engine for egalitarianism. It challenges white and male standards for knowledge excellence at the same time as it affirms the value of educated intelligence for all people everywhere. It holds the promise of building worldly knowledge and addressing worldly predicaments in ways that repair, rather than reproduce, the hierarchies and exclusions that stratify populations, generate intense civil and political conflicts, and prevent the possibility of sustainable futures for humanity and the planet as a whole.

It is impossible to overstate how severely privatization and financialization challenge this dimension of the vocation of the public university. Privatization limits access and funnels the historically excluded toward technical training rather than broad education in the sciences and letters.¹⁴

Financialization induces universities to prioritize faculty, students, programs and research areas that boost rankings; this means favoring those with the test scores, publications or rankings in the field that generate this boost. Put the other way around, institutions or programs that reach for non-traditional students or faculty, or struggle to feature and even center research and curriculums that attract and empower them, will suffer from lower ranking, resulting in diminished investment from states, private donors, and the very students and faculty they want to attract. In a university governed by the ratings, faculty and student “diversity,” along with public interest research, may be part of branding; however, these things cannot comprise the institutional core of the privatized publics without suicidal effects. Again, the issue is not primarily money but shareholder value, measured by ratings of faculty, programs, and students and generated by applicant SATs, GREs, LSATs, post-graduate placement and income streams, and faculty prestige and productivity. Notwithstanding financialization’s ostensible reward of economic conduct that is disruptive and innovative, rankings produce profound conservatism in values and choices, reproducing existing social hierarchies, along with mainstream methods and criteria of excellence.



I have argued that the vocation of the twenty-first century public university is the generation of publicly oriented knowledge and the broad incorporation of publics, both of which are undermined by privatization and financialization. Of course, the university does other important things, such as developing skills and knowledges for particular professions, or developing research applications for both commercial and non-commercial purposes. However valuable, these cannot be said to rest at the heart of the vocation of the public university *qua* public university. In fact, they often do not require universities at all, and are increasingly taking place on non-university sites — institutes, corporate campuses, or virtual campuses — dedicated to technical training and research.¹⁵

The two dimensions of the public university's vocation we have been considering, worldly knowledge and incorporating the excluded, are also fundamental to democracy — reviving it, renewing it, and rescuing it from the frightening alternatives on the contemporary horizon. To avoid despotism — whether by authoritarian anti-democratic forces or those of technocracy — citizens must have honed the intellectual capacities to minimally parse a complex world. Moreover, to avoid the development of new neo-feudal race and caste-based orders, consecrated and secured by the ideas of the dominant

one, knowledge must be widespread and worldly, and the historically excluded must be among those both generating and gaining access to such knowledge.

Although it may sound, at times, nostalgic, I want to insist that this brief for the vocation of public universities in the twenty-first century is not a lament for a golden age. If twentieth century universities aspired to certain aspects of the calling I have outlined, these aspirations were severely cross-cut by their reproduction of white male hegemony, especially in the scholarly guild and the forms, methods and content of research prized by that guild. Public universities have never comported with a vocation to be fully of and for a democratic public. Purity is also inappropriate here. Universities will also always have other aims and interests specific to their time and cannot be held to a standard of purity. They will always be engaged in some compromises with their sources of survival and with the powers organizing them. What is certain, however, is that cultivating democratic access and worldly knowledge is wholly at odds with the neo-liberalization and financialization of higher education. We are thus at risk of losing universities as sites for the generation of democracy in any meaningful sense of the word, and are also at risk of universities becoming vocational in the familiar modern sense of job training. With this turn completed would come a loss of freedom itself, carried by the loss of learning appropriate to free people,

those capable of self-government. It would be a tragedy of monumental proportions — for knowledge, humanity and the future of the world — were universities to suffer this inversion at this moment in world history.

By way of concluding, let us make a brief return to Weber. In “Politics as a Vocation,” he distinguished between those who live “for” politics — those for whom politics is a vocation — and those who live “from” politics — those for whom politics is a job, an income source (Weber, *Politics*, 40). Weber understood that the two might converge in places, but argued that they must not be conflated lest the vocation for politics be lost as it is reduced to a means of individual survival. A calling ceases to be a calling when it becomes a means to some other end.

Administrators of universities today risk instrumentalizing both the “public” and “education” for the survival of universities that would serve neither and in fact would have no distinct purpose at all. This is what the combination of privatization and financialization have generated, an ever-intensifying drive to entrepreneurialize and financialize both the form and substance of the university, to follow the money and the rankings regardless of the value to education or to the public of this pursuit. Without re-establishing the vocation of universities, and doggedly insuring that this vocation contours every important aspect

of their existence, public universities will increasingly live “from” the public and “from” education rather than for them. Hawking their brand and wares like every other commercial entity, and trading on speculative value like every other financialized one, what began as one of modern civilizations’ richest venues of human endeavor, and most important contributions to human freedom, may end as an expensive scam... one the public altogether ceases to support because nothing about it remains public.

- 1 The focus on vocation was not Weber’s own choice. The public forum providing the auspice for his lecture was a series on “geistige Arbeit als Beruf”—intellectual or spiritual work as a calling. David Owen and Tracy Strong, drawing on Wolfgang Schluchter, also note that Weber’s lecture was prompted by an essay by Alexander Schwab which had argued for the incompatibility of a calling and scientific conduct. See Owen and Strong, Introduction, in *Max Weber, The Vocation Lectures*, eds. D. Owen and T. Strong (Hackett, 2004), p. xiii. Hereafter, the lectures are cited in the text as “Weber, *Politics*” and “Weber, *Science*.”
- 2 See Weber’s *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.
- 3 From the Morrill Act: “without excluding other scientific and classical studies and including military tactics, to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts, in such manner as the legislatures of the States may respectively prescribe, in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life” (United States Code Sec. 304).

- 4 The critical literature on privatizing public education is now substantial and excellent. My own contributions include, among others, Brown, "Educating Human Capital," Chapter Six of *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Zone, 2015) and Brown, "Neoliberalized Knowledge," *History of the Present* 1.1 (May 2011).
- 5 Michel Feher has theorized the fundamental change in value that accompanies the financialized phase of neoliberalism. See Feher, *Rated Agencies* (Zone, forthcoming).
- 6 Ever more indebted educational institutions are themselves pushed toward policies that qualify them for borrowing and servicing their debts, in particular steady and predictable tuition increases. See Bob Meister, "They Pledged Your Tuition," www.cucfa.org/news/2009_oct11.php.
- 7 Christopher Newfield has been tracking and analyzing this phenomenon for some time. See his last two books, Christopher Newfield, *Unmaking the Public University: The Forty-Year Assault on the Middle Class* (Harvard University Press, 2011) and *The Great Mistake: How We Wrecked Public Universities and How We Can Fix Them* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016). Out of the now enormous literature on the transformation of private universities in the past decade, Newfield's work stands apart for its meticulous research, clear-minded analysis, and appreciation of the larger political and social forces — not only economic ones — generating public divestment from public universities. For recent work on privatization and higher education, see Andrew Leyshon and Nigel Thrift, "The Capitalization of Almost Everything: The Future of Finance and Capitalism," *Theory, Culture and Society* 24.7–8 (2007); Bob Meister, "Debt and Taxes: Can the Financial Industry Save Public Universities?," *Representations* 116.1 (Fall 2011); pp. 128–55; Susanne Soederberg, "Student Loans, Debtfare and the Commodification of Debt: The Politics and the Displacement of Risk," *Critical Sociology* 40.5 (September 2014), pp. 689–709; Ivan Ascher and Will Roberts, "Critical Exchange: Education and scholarship in the twenty-first century marketplace" in *Contemporary Political Theory* (2015) 14, 409–433; Arunima Gopinath, "Who's Afraid of Public Education?" in *The Wire* (March 3, 2017), www.thewire.in/113311/public-higher-education-privatisation/.

- 8 For analysis of how financialization has changed the governance and principles of value in organizations, see Randy Martin, *Financialization of Daily Life* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002); Edward LiPuma and Benjamin Lee, *Financial Derivatives and the Globalization of Risk* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Robin Blackburn, "Finance and the Fourth Dimension," *New Left Review* 39 (May–June 2006); Gerald F. Davis, *Managed by the Markets: How Finance Re-Shaped America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Greta Krippner, *Capitalizing on Crisis: The Political Origins of the Rise of Finance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); Michael Hudson, *Finance Capitalism and Its Discontents* (ISLET, 2012); Dimitris P. Sotiropoulos, John Milios, and Spyros Lapatsioras, *A Political Economy of Contemporary Capitalism and its Crisis: Demystifying Finance* (London: Routledge, 2013); Joseph Vogl, *The Specter of Capital*, trans. Joachim Redner and Robert Savage (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014); Miranda Joseph, *Debt to Society: Accounting for Life Under Capitalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); Melinda Cooper and Martijn Konings, "Contingency and Foundation: Rethinking Money, Debt, and Finance after the Crisis," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 114.2 (April 2015); Ivan Ascher, *Portfolio Society: On the Capitalist Mode of Prediction* (Zone, 2016); Michel Feher: *Rated Agencies* (Zone, forthcoming); and a dissertation in progress by UC Berkeley Political Science graduate student, Brian Judge.
- 9 See Feher, *Rated Agencies* (Zone, forthcoming).
- 10 See Ascher, *Portfolio Society*, especially chapters 3 and 4.
- 11 Articles on how to improve university rankings abound on the web. A sample: www.timeshighereducation.com/features/top-20-ways-to-improve-your-world-university-ranking/410392.article#; www.qsdigitalsolutions.com/blog/7-ways-to-improve-university-rankings-in-the-eeea-region/. And on improving personal rankings: www.elsevier.com/connect/get-found-optimize-your-research-articles-for-search-engines.

- 12 UC's bond rating was severely downgraded by Moody's when an agreement between the California governor and the University of California President capped tuition in 2014. See "Rating Action: Moody's downgrades University of California to Aa2 and assigns Aa2 to \$950M of GRBs," statement posted at www.moody.com/research/Moodys-downgrades-University-of-California-to-Aa2-and-assigns-Aa2--PR_294817.
- 13 There are also amalgamations and algorithms built from wildly skewed, partial and distorted data bases, such as Google Scholar. Yet this very rating agency has become increasingly important in institutional decisions about in the hiring, tenuring and promotion of scholars.
- 14 While high fee aid programs are supposedly aimed at assuring access by the poor, these packages do not cover the whole cost, thus imposing jobs and loans on those in the middle and the bottom. Moreover, price tags alone is a mighty deterrent for poor families. The ever-growing private industry supporting college preparation and application also gives applicants from well-off families tremendous advantage in accessing prestige universities.
- 15 Medical schools and those of the other health professions, for example, can be located in hospitals and other medical "campuses," as some already are. There are also many free-standing law schools. And the rise of phenomena like Apple University may bode a future in which corporations find it beneficial to contour what used to take place in generic business schools to their own corporate styles and products. See www.nytimes.com/2014/08/11/technology/-inside-apples-internal-training-program-.html?_r=0 and www.businessinsider.com/heres-what-its-like-to-attend-apples-secret-university-2015-2.
The contemporary obsession with investing in and enlarging so-called STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) fields, especially as the breakthrough area for women and minorities, is symptomatic of recasting universities as domains for the enhancement of human capital. Many have also mistakenly tried to defend liberal arts curriculums along these lines, trying to make

the case for the arts and humanities as building critical thinking, and analytic capacities sought by employers. We ought instead to be articulating their value in building an educated citizenry, addressing public problems, and saving the world from the barbarism of being ruled by finance, or simply from extinction altogether.

EDUCATION IN AN AGE OF DISTRACTION

An Interview with Elie During

So what is education to me? I have no ready-made answer to this question and can only rely on my experience of researching *and* teaching philosophy. The most remarkable thing for me, in that respect, is that the educational setting presents itself as an opportunity to prolong my life as a student, a life which I have never quite left. I'm not saying this to indulge in a pedagogical mannerism — something like: “we are all students for each other...” — but merely stating a rather banal matter of fact which nevertheless turns out to be significant in actual practice.

I have been teaching philosophy for the past 15 years or so in various settings — philosophy departments as well as art schools — but I still consider myself as a student in a very real sense. Every time I have to teach something I have the feeling that I am actually confronted with new materials which force me to put back to work whatever background knowledge I may have accumulated over the years. This is rather uncomfortable, in the sense that I cannot rely on any previously designed format, although

there are of course gimmicks or modules that can be re-used. This situation of continuous self-education is perhaps specific to philosophy — or at least more apparent there than in any other discipline. Henri Bergson, a major figure in my personal Pantheon, considered himself a student until the very end. He was almost 63 years old when he confronted himself with the emerging theory of relativity: I have looked through the documentation he gathered for the task, and seen the several layers of multi-colored notes and annotations in his physics textbooks. It was both impressive and somewhat comforting to realize that he had stumbled upon something important in his late years, that he had encountered new problems, new ways of thinking that pushed him to develop his own ideas in directions he did not really foresee.

There is no time for retirement in philosophy. At some point, you may become a master student, but you never stop studying. You are never done learning, and it is important to cultivate that feeling and convey it to students as you are teaching. Of course, this can only work if this experience undergoes a process of transformation, because students are not exactly in the position of doing research themselves. They are discovering and exploring a landscape that is already more or less familiar to the teacher. What is required, then, is a transfusion that converts the feeling of puzzlement experienced by the researcher into a sensibility for the extremely odd, and at times otherworldly

nature of the ideas and problems encountered in the study of the most classical figures in the canon. In other words, the perplexities of the researcher must infuse pedagogical dynamics in a way that heightens the capacity for astonishment. Deleuze used to say that there is something eerie about any genuinely creative philosophical doctrine: it is part detective novel, part science-fiction... This is an intuition that both teacher and student can share, from different perspectives.

The crisis in culture and education that Hannah Arendt talks about can be interpreted in many ways,¹ but the central issue revolves around our capacity to engage in the pedagogical relation in a way that allows the individual to develop not only a particular skill or acquire a specific body of knowledge, but also to flourish in a more general sense. The problem, as it is traditionally described, is to acquire the taste, you might say, or the *ethos* which will make you eager to learn and acquire new knowledge for the sake of it — that is, beyond the immediate practical benefits that one may expect from it. Now I am not sure I entirely share the humanist presupposition of this idea, but one thing is certain: in the case of philosophical knowledge — if there is such a thing — this *ethos* is directly linked with the feeling of bewilderment that makes you want to know more. In that sense, it is very close to aesthetic experience. Remember what Kant said about the aesthetic

Idea: it essentially gives you ‘more’ to think... Well, what happens when information is immediately available, ‘underhand’, so it may seem that you don’t need to set up a particular educational or pedagogical relation to get it and assimilate it? You have more and more to learn and less and less to be excited about. Because if everything is virtually laid out and available, you are confronted with a continuum where the distinction between what is ordinary and remarkable is inevitably blurred. The logosphere constituted by the worldwide web conjures up the image of a maximally dense Leibnizian universe where a continuous chain of variants connects any proposition with every other, including an innumerable number of unremarkable or frivolous propositions that are not worth one hour of our troubles.

Let me be clear about this. The problem is not that everything is flattened and packaged in readymade formats. Quite the contrary. The institution of education, the classroom setting in schools and universities, has always run the risk of trivialization through standardization and leveling. There is nothing particularly new here. Good teachers have always been suspicious of textbooks. If anything, digital humanities and the internet offer ever more possibilities of direct exposure to genuine sources. For every Wikipedia entry, there are thousands of original references in the form of digitalized documents that can be accessed in two or three clicks without having to

physically spend time in libraries. The problem is to avoid being submerged by all this material. And it is only natural to consider classroom education as a preparatory training for the great online navigation awaiting the researcher. The teacher would act as a super-browser, inculcating the “method” which will allow students to survive on their own in the deep forest of shared knowledge.

This is not exactly how I view things. Or better put, the real challenge, it seems to me, lies elsewhere. The general disposition I have observed in myself as much as in my students is not exactly one of disorientation, but one of distraction, and that is a wholly different matter. Disorientation is easy to fix: you need a guide, and some reference frame. Teachers are trained to provide this. But what if they themselves suffer from distraction in the face of the abundance of “affordances” provided by the new digital aether of knowledge? What if they have a hard time focusing on one single track of reasoning or inquiry? We are all distracted. And by this I do not mean solicitations deflecting our attention towards non-academic tasks. I mean being distracted by the overwhelming abundance of resources accessible for academic work! In other words, it is the very matter that we are dealing with that becomes distracting. And this is not merely a matter of methods of navigation or “data-mining”. The problem is reflected in the concrete condition of classroom interaction.

Typically, during a seminar, students will take notes on their computers, while searching and looking up some of the names, texts and quotes that I am referring to. This is totally unprecedented.

Some may say that, as a result, the educator more and more resembles a switchboard operator, channeling and redistributing elements of knowledge that are already out there, acting as a constant source of distraction. There is some truth in this view: part of the task of the educator is to organize and articulate this distraction in a creative way. The teacher is more than an experienced student pointing out routes and shortcuts that will enable other students to save time as they are making their way. In reality, what he achieves is exactly the opposite. I believe that the main task of the educator is to find ways of *losing time* that may prove beneficial in the long run. It is a matter of prolonging the journey itself by taking detours, by dilating time. Why? Well, precisely, in order to learn and organize the endemic distraction in a way that is productive and does not lead to wrecked attention and competence, and more importantly, that increases the students' sensibility to the remarkable oddness of genuine theoretical innovations.

The important thing — which leads back to my first observation regarding teachers as belated students — is that the educator and the student share the same predicament here. It would be easy if we were simply distracted

by extra-curricular activities such as going out, watching youtube videos and the like. I am not denying that such problems exist, but unfortunately there is no cure for them inside the classroom, unless we consider that it is the role of the teacher — as a more “mature” person — to correct bad habits through disciplinary methods. What I find more interesting is the fact that one may be distracted by knowledge itself, by the very thing that one is supposed to acquire. And it is important to realize that we all share the same problem here. There is obviously a functional asymmetry between teachers and students, but I think it is basically no more than a temporal difference: teachers started being students long before becoming the teachers of their students. And no one is preserved from the kind of distraction I have in mind.

What the situation suggests is a peculiar exercise in joint distraction. The educational relation is often described as an apprenticeship of freedom. Basically, what you must learn is to do without a teacher. But in the particular situation we are facing, things are somewhat reversed: the students must learn to do with a teacher whom they may feel they do not need anymore. In thinking this, they are wrong of course: they need the teacher as the necessary distraction from their own distraction. Yet it is equally important that the teacher also considers the possibility of drawing from the educational relation in order to organize his own distraction.

Because he is himself struggling with different layers of knowledge that may appear completely heterogeneous. The basic skill that is required from the educational situation in the teacher's perspective, whether in a seminar or a classroom setting, is to be able to sum up or condense some rather complex idea or theory in a few words or sentences and connect them with very simple — and possibly silly — examples. But the fact that we are now immersed in an ocean of immediately accessible information calls for new methods for developing the critical capacity of navigating between different levels of contraction and dilation of thought on different planes. This is the only way to avoid the inherent “flatness” of the digital web of knowledge, and confer on it a new dimensionality or voluminosity. This is something I learned in art schools, confronted with an audience that had little resemblance to the one I was used to in more traditional academic settings. It is a matter of zooming in and zooming out, of collapsing a long chain of arguments into a one-liner, of branching in unexpected directions to connect things that were loosely coexisting in different regions of our mind-map, of sustaining a simultaneous, distributed attention to two voices speaking at once, of reading a text or an image in transparency through another, and of alternating between phases of brutal acceleration and moments of suspension and dilation. Being involved in an argument, or absorbed in a text, may yield moments of genuine

diffuse, non-focused or “floating” attention after a time. We should value such moments, because they elicit what Ehrenzweig described as a “scanning” process enabling us to pick up singularities at the surface of our field of perception and reveal previously unnoticed patterns on which to experiment further. This is good. So is the possibility of cruising at high speed between heterogeneous “strata” of the cultural landscape: Deleuze and Guattari aimed at something similar when they spoke of “pop-philosophy” as an antidote to the hermeneutical ethos which brings us to dig ever deeper while fundamentally remaining on the same discursive plane.

To sum up, the idea is to beat distraction on its own ground by replicating the sort of multi-media, multi-channel distribution of knowledge that has become our natural condition as intensive users of digital technologies. When I speak of contraction and dilation, what I have in mind is something like Bergson’s diagram of the memory cone in *Matter and Memory*. It is of course essential to make time for close reading, to get back to the sources and confront a material head-on, but we must also consider that an idea, a theory, is inherently *non-local*, that it tends to be distributed on a variety of planes according to different degrees of contraction or dilation, just as a memory — according to Bergson — is not a discrete unit but rather a radiating wave or dynamic schema virtually spanning across the entire psyche, with its multiple “planes of

consciousness". At the highest degree of contraction, a theory can be encapsulated in a rallying cry or a simple image. At the lowest degree, it is like a mist or a perpetual movie projected in a dreamlike atmosphere, diffusing in the entire cultural spectrum, with innumerable relays in the digital aether. All these manifestations, taken together, and appropriately handled in the context of a class or seminar, can contribute to enhancing the inherent oddity which is the hallmark of genuinely creative thought.

1 [Ed.] Cf. Hannah Arendt's essay: "The crisis in education", 1954.

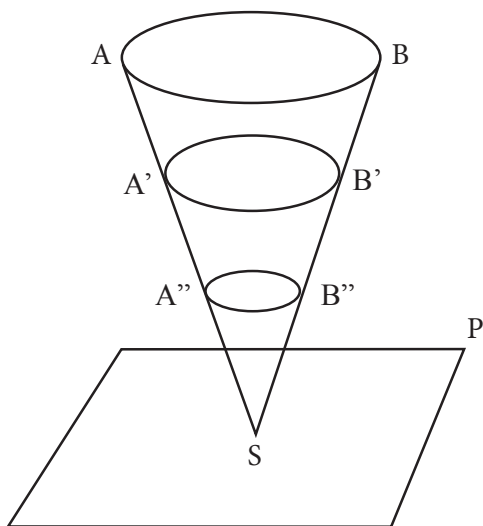


Illustration of Henri Bergson's Memory Cone. Original appears in his book *Matter and Memory*

AUTONOMY AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Chris Fynsk

I will adapt, for my remarks, the framework of inquiry offered by the editors of this volume with their three questions regarding the value of “autonomy” as a traditional end of higher education.¹

I should acknowledge from the outset, however, that I will have to struggle with this term “autonomy” — it remains deeply at odds with a thought of human finitude. “Freedom” speaks to me much more immediately, and if we are to win terms back from the tradition in full cognizance of their destiny in modern metaphysics (to which a near-century of European thought has directed its critical energies), I would prefer the latter word, given that it preserves the possibility of a relation to otherness that “autonomy” would seem to frustrate. “Functionality,” which “consumer satisfaction” only cloaks, perhaps names best the end of most education in the modern, developed world (this, sadly, is how we must answer the question: “What is education today?”). Resistance to this fate of the educated subject in the era of neo-liberalism and

Technik is difficult to think without reference to a notion of freedom (a value to which the term “liberal” — in the phrase “liberal arts” — must struggle more than ever to reach²). But a notion of autonomy can perhaps also be brought forth that serves this latter notion of resistance.

In any case, a notion of autonomy can be articulated that speaks to the highest ends envisioned in the speculative efforts of those who prepared the foundation of the University of Berlin, and while the philosophical assumptions and ambitions of these thinkers cannot be taken over without critical transformation, their understanding of academic freedom, and what thought *at the university* might be, marks an invaluable precedent. They set many of the terms of a struggle relating to education that might have seemed almost hopeless in Europe less than a year ago (though meaningful struggle without hope is still conceivable), and only more difficult today in the midst of convulsions that may bring new restrictions to projects of critical thinking and other manifestations of freedom. This is not the occasion for returning to the texts of these thinkers, but I want to retain their inspiring efforts (and a tradition of thinking that has proceeded from them) as a point of reference for measuring the ever-more essential character of the struggle against the educational processes that serve that grim term, “functionality.”

I. Teaching Autonomy

So, working with a loose sense of the term “autonomy,” let me ask how, in higher education, we can endeavour to free an autonomous exercise of thought, be this in any field of research or creative practice. And let me begin by speaking from my own site, which today is the European Graduate School — an effort to recover a meaning for the European university that remains modest in actual resources, but is nonetheless commensurate with the speculative endeavours of those who prepared its re-foundation over two centuries ago.

I speak from this special site because I believe that new educational practices serving the end I have defined must be won experimentally. I recall here the delightful thought-experiment undertaken by Gérard Granel in *De l'université* in 1982, and the playful fiction he proposed, despairing of any effort at reform in the socio-economic context of the time.³ I remain in agreement with him regarding the profoundly limiting scope of the horizons of possibility offered by our modern socio-economic order (even if I disagree with him about the futility of struggling *from within*), and I am inclined to think that these horizons have not significantly broadened with the extraordinary technical developments now on offer. Accordingly, I am not sure that a practical design for a new university exists that can satisfy the idea of the university toward which

I have gestured — a university where the possibility of a free thought of a *worldly* character can be practiced or prepared. Clearly, a new university must be invented. But I am a bit more accepting of our finite conditions than Granel, and a bit more open to the possibility of the event (in education). From this ground I remain devoted to a concrete form of experimentation guided by values such as academic freedom.

I would also underscore that I accept Gérard Granel's argument that the exercise of thought in any given discipline of study must engage the existence of those who practice the discipline, and must seek to draw forth the meaning of that practice for those practitioners and for a larger public at the level of their world. The latter term can only mark a question at this juncture, but one that remains unavoidable, for it is perfectly obvious (and has been so since the founding of the University of Berlin) that any question of profound social meaning requires some thought of the whole of social existence. We encounter this, for example, in the painful exigency of thinking today what a term such as "refugee" implies. Universities have increasingly surrendered to technocratic imperatives that reduce education to the preparation of expertise in a "knowledge economy" that requires discrete forms of professional specialization or mere technical skills. But the resulting isolation of disciplines from one another (with the

eclipse of the question of the whole to which I am pointing) condemns all of them to some degree of abstraction. Therefore, it becomes imperative to keep alive in higher education not only the question of the foundations of any given discipline, but also its relation to all other fields of inquiry in a “university” worthy of this name. One must therefore seek, in and through every discipline, a question of the order of the one Maurice Blanchot posed for literary study: “What does it mean that something like literature should exist?” This is a question that leads to the imperative of broad cross-disciplinary inquiry, even as it leads back to literary study by reason of the singular character of the literary event, forcing an acute form of disciplinary reflection. Without a questioning of this kind on its horizon, once again, a discipline’s study is prey to formalism and the hold of abstract jargon, however “scientific” in its formulations; it can only produce further abstraction. I have sought, in *The Claim of Language*, to draw forth what this argument implies for the humanities inasmuch as they address and deploy distinctive usages of language, opening by this means to concrete questions bearing on all dimensions of human existence (including a relation to the world that obliges us to entertain, today, notions of the post- or in- human). I would argue that the individual who undertakes and undergoes such an engagement with language (taking this term in a broad sense) effectively opens to a free exercise of thought.⁴

But I wonder if *one* passage of this kind (from one disciplinary site), can ever suffice for a concrete form of “autonomy.” And is the opening not always threatened by a disciplinary closure where the *relay* called for in exposure to limits of any discipline (when it touches on questions of fundamental social meaning) is impeded, if not blocked? To rephrase what I have said thus far: every practice of thought calls for complementation of its efforts *vis à vis* the exigencies of that “thing” to which the phrase “*res publica*” points, the real that lies at the horizon of every search for social meaning in a particular discursive mode.⁵ Thought knows in the always singular paths of this search the lure of a whole; and what inspired researcher does not sense that they have touched upon this whole when they achieve in their writing or presentation an experience of concreteness? (Everyone will be familiar with the phenomenon wherein researchers believe that their work is echoed in many other forms of research going on around them — what is important about this slightly comical phenomenon is that there is some truth in the experience.) But the self-reflective researcher will also recognise in that same movement the inherently partial (or better, fragmentary) character of that concreteness, and hence the requirement of the relay to which I have referred. Every striving for reality in thought must go to the limits of the path chosen, and will inevitably disclose those limits. Is it not therefore imperative that a “higher”

education reveal to the student multiple passages of a fundamental character? And in a time when mythic constructions of the whole are in resurgence, is this critical practice not all the more imperative?

With this principle in view, I believe it is possible to affirm philosophically the choice of the European Graduate School (in the Division devoted to Philosophy, Art, and Critical Thought) to construct a curriculum that is *without* disciplinary bounds in the sense that it requires of its students work in a series of seminars that implicitly (or explicitly) entail a fundamental questioning of the fields taken up in them — there being no limit to the number of fields that might be broached within a course of study involving 12 seminars (for each of the advanced degrees: MA and PhD). Every student, whatever their special field of expertise or professional background (the EGS actively promotes diversity in this respect), must undertake this cross-disciplinary experience.

It should be noted immediately that a very particular form of teaching is required for this form of curriculum, one that is inherently *public* in its address insofar as it cannot presuppose advanced preparation on the part of the students, and can only rely on a profound interest and a willingness to attempt the course of study. Professors must effectively *translate* their thought in terms that are accessible

to a diverse group, but in no way reductive with respect to the questioning undertaken. It is this challenge that seems to bring the distinguished faculty back to the EGS year after year, for their recasting of their thought in such exceptional circumstances is inevitably generative of new thinking, along with remarkable pedagogical encounters.

Of course, such a movement between disciplines implies that seminar training cannot be directed to the development of mastery in a particular area of research (a process that normally entails progression from introductory levels to more advanced ones). Mastery will come once a chosen field is defined and explored by the student in independent study, the supposition being that such learning does not require constant oversight if advanced students are initially given the means to address the fundamentals of any discipline. The latter means — habits of enquiry sharpened by extensive exposure to philosophically informed theory and sustained questioning with respect to contemporary topics — are provided in the seminar training of the EGS, where seminar directors are leading proponents of their fields, individuals who in many cases have shaped the very fields they address in their seminar.

What is crucial in this model, I emphasize, is not acquisition of a fund of knowledge, but repeated passages, in fundamental questioning, to the limits of what any given

discipline can offer with respect to some topic of inquiry. This course of study, when it is genuinely engaged, will foster a distinctive freedom in the students' approach to their own chosen field of research — a singular capacity to construct a problematic requiring cross-disciplinary inquiry, and an ability to address that problematic with a special breadth and methodological sophistication. Let us call this a disciplinary reflexivity of a kind, though “reflexivity” does not quite capture, as I will try to show in addressing the second point raised by the editors, the form of freedom involved.

Disciplines are resistant formations; they will always reassert their hold in some measure as a student strives to define the question that organizes their study and to support their argument in a scholarly manner. The structures by which disciplines reproduce themselves are powerfully constraining — and this can be affirmed without consideration of the more coercive practices sometimes involved. Scholarly protocol in each field and in each national context is profoundly defining (both enabling and limiting) and the constraints involved are easily hidden by institutional practices involving a distribution of rewards.⁶ The EGS recognizes the necessity of those *defining* elements of discipline; it is wholly committed to academic standards. But it is also seeking to impart a free relation to disciplinary constructions and a capacity

for singular passages between them — not in a spirit of eclecticism, but for the purpose of addressing freely core dimensions of existence in the contemporary world. Exposure to theory, in itself, does not bring the critical freedom I have sought to describe. The explosion in theory of the last century has not brought a true explosion of disciplines simply because disciplines can easily contain the purchase and philosophical implications of theoretical inquiry. The “free use” of philosophically informed theory of the kind we seek to advance at the EGS requires a constant passage beyond the limits of the disciplinary articulation of knowledge and institutional mechanisms serving the containment of thought. The effort can have only limited impact in relation to the stultifying structures that largely define what teaching is today. But freedom, when exercised, has a way of propagating itself.

II. Autonomy and Authority

The pedagogy leading to the free exercise of thought described here would appear to require a form of mastery and an accompanying authority. And this is indeed the case in some measure, though only to a limited degree (as I will attempt to show). Teaching that pursues the *fundamental* ambition to which I have referred — teaching that is not simply research-led, but intrinsically a form of research — must go beyond a mere imparting of knowledge, be this an exposition of relevant theory or the work of leading

names in a field. (And this is why the EGS seeks to hire the leading names, not their commentators.⁷) However competent such exposition might be, it remains short of the form of thoughtful questioning to which students must be exposed if they are to learn what it is to think on their own — if they are to *learn thinking* (a highly problematic formulation that is at the heart of the question posed by the editors of this volume). Yes, in an EGS seminar, there will inevitably be the communication of insight into the discursive grounds (historical and philosophical) of the topic or problematic under consideration. The experience of the “master-teacher” is invaluable here, particularly if they are to address students who are not specialists in the field under consideration. This experience is also an important source of the authority the professor requires if they are to lead their students through a period in which many students must discover that they are *not yet thinking* with respect to the questioning undertaken in the seminar. But if the teacher is to *lead into thinking*, or stimulate it anew, they must be prepared to undertake a very intense form of reflective engagement with text, image, or schema, and develop this into a genuine questioning.⁸ Again, a great deal of knowledge will be communicated in this process; there will also be imparted (*mitgeteilt*) habits of questioning and a form of exposure that is always communicated with a singular *Stimmung* (a certain disposition of energy conveyed in a tonality and posture

of questioning). Students — we will all recall this — first learn from their most influential teachers *gestures* of thought in a mimetic exercise. But they will also witness, if they are truly following (and this speaks to the teacher's task), a *ceding* of mastery.

A surrender occurs when the professor explores the limits of their grasp of the thing that holds their attention. Jean-François Lyotard described this surrender at numerous points in his work on the teaching relation by arguing that a philosophically informed questioning in any field will demand a form of re-beginning and a self-exposure that is more than reminiscent of infancy in that it rejoins a native capacity for openness (with all the suffering — “*misère*” — this can also bring).⁹ Lyotard was seeking a pedagogy that might prepare for what he termed “the event,” and I would argue that what I have called a “free use” of thought is “free,” in part, by reason of its capacity in this regard (a strange form of “capacity,” to be sure, but nonetheless something for which one strives).

The true master is therefore always, at some point, a little less than a master, and what they will teach is in fact the autodidaxy that they perform in their effort to approach that place where thought engages the thing of its concern (whatever the disciplinary site from which one starts). They will communicate their own *searching* act of thought, their

own effort to *begin to think*. *Se former au retour*, Lyotard writes, invoking a *Bildung* that involves a form of dispossession or exposure and thus the experience of the return of a form of infancy. The master “forms” by inviting to a repetition of self-discovery in a “philosophical” course of study that is of necessity an exposure to what one cannot master, namely the finitude of one’s understanding, and an exposure to the possibility of genuine engagement.

Projecting toward the ends of such teaching (that is, beyond the immediate end of preparing students for independent research in an academic thesis), we can say that it takes on a profoundly ethico-political character to the extent that it involves preparing the student for a form of thinking performance that is perhaps the prerequisite of genuine democracy (at least in the sense described by Jean-François Lyotard when he argues that a republic must teach its citizens what it is to bring something “other” to the public space than a repetition of the same).¹⁰ It is *ethico-political* in the sense offered to us by Emmanuel Levinas in his meditations on the teaching that occurs in the relation with the human other (*autrui*), and inevitably political in the sense that prompting the “self-formation” of a subject capable of conceiving a free relation to the “functionality” to which they are summoned, and always in some measure *with* the other (for what autonomy they have learned has come to them in relation), has political meaning, however undefined. Again, there is a form of

autonomy because this pedagogy requires of the students an act of translation by which the singular path of thought undertaken by the professor is appropriated in a new act of “autodidaxy” wherein the student experiences otherness for themselves. A student will often mime the path undertaken by the professor for some time as they learn to translate the singular gesture of thought they have encountered; but the “pedagogy” I sketch here ultimately requires a different form of repetition, a genuine re-beginning. And this requirement, I emphasize, will become all the more acute when a student undergoes a *serial* exposure to such an exercise of thought through a number of cross-disciplinary passages. “Autonomy” could perhaps name here the always singular search for the rule that will guide one’s thought, both in the response to a teaching, and in the effort to proceed independently in a research project. And yes, one undertakes this search in some measure alone, but always from the ground of a recalled exposure to the other (the teacher) and always in exposure to oneself, by way of the anamnesis that occurs with the return to infancy in re-learning what it means to speak meaningfully with respect to a given topic, text, or problematic.

III. The Autonomy of the Educator

I will speak again from a specific site for this last section, offering, this time, a brief account of an episode from

everyday academic life. My words will not bear directly on institutional autonomy, but rather to the effects on faculty (and specifically their intellectual freedom) when such autonomy begins to erode under the pressure of contemporary socio-economic and political agendas. The episode I will recount is not meant to be exemplary; it was simply the occasion for a form of discovery, and it happens to involve a project bearing on teaching.

The impact of neoliberalism on the contemporary academy manifests itself in uneven ways, but one may observe in many academic systems a gradual supplanting of intellectual authority by administrative authority, and the concomitant phenomenon whereby those chosen to administer are those most successful in ‘administering’ their careers through grant development and other forms of rewarded service. (In the neoliberal academic order, such entrepreneurial self-administration presents itself as a form of autonomy.) Those most successful in securing grants are also generally those best able to conform to the standards enjoined by bureaucratic bodies such as research councils, whose criteria for selection are largely set with regard to state economic priorities. The offshoot in the UK, for example, is the imperative that all research demonstrates its “social impact.” The rhetorical acrobatics prompted by this criterion for evaluation can prove amusing, but the results are no laughing matter. Even PhD students

seeking financial support must be prepared to document at considerable length the social impact of their proposed projects; needless to say, the pressure of this requirement at such an early stage has a quite powerful effect on the character of the research produced.

In 2013 and 2014, I undertook with three colleagues (two of them from the School of Education at the University of Aberdeen, an important institution in Northeast Scotland), a project entitled “The Teacher in Public.”¹¹ The project was devoted to transforming teacher training in Scotland and began with an effort to develop an MA program that would offer teachers exposure to fields outside those of their specialty and whatever exposure they might gain to cross-disciplinary thinking from their program of training in pedagogy (which offers only the most basic psychological and sociological insights).

I am sure I do not need to set forth the motives behind the effort to enhance teacher training.¹² Let any parent in Scotland (or elsewhere) who knows something about academic preparation look closely at the training of those to whom they have entrusted their children’s earliest educational experience (they need not even open a psychology textbook....), and they will grasp the imperative of reform. But this project was especially ambitious in that it sought a form of training that would prepare a teacher to grasp the broad meaning of their *public* role and what this could mean for their work in the classroom or in

situations requiring advocacy.¹³ For the latter purpose, the project envisioned an enhanced exposure to the critical thought and creative practices available in the fields of the humanities (as well as some social sciences). Here, the motives required some presentation, for not all humanists seemed to understand why they might have something to contribute to teacher training.

Because we were seeking support initially in the funding bodies serving the humanities, it fell to me (the senior academic in this area) to write the grant application to the AHRC. I will not attempt to assess my skill level in this area, or the quality of my work on this particular occasion. The project seemed only to require devotion and care. Could there be a project of higher social impact (particularly in that it had solid University backing and drew into association significant public figures in the field of education, governmental representatives, and leading academics)? And dare I say, could there be a more worthy investment from the side of the humanities, who struggle today to justify their work in the larger social context? But let me move past the possible grounds for the failure of this bid and focus on my experience, which is what I most want to communicate with this relatively banal story of one more unsuccessful grant application.

A year of preparation involving intensive meetings of inestimable value for the participants, then the creation of a national and international network of researchers, came

down to a quite lengthy exercise in filling numerous boxes with an appropriate number of characters. The characters (combined in words and sentences) had to conform to the vague expectations of largely nameless bodies — bureaucratic committees charged with vetting a flooded national system. Weeks, perhaps a month devoted solely to composing the application turned into what was in fact a revelatory experience — for I grasped concretely, for the first time in fact, what a career devoted to answering those vague expectations defined by governmental mandate in a conforming, always “safe,” rhetoric could do to a young academic, already saddled with onerous teaching loads.

In short, it became newly and painfully evident to me that this system imposed very significant constraints on academic freedom. There was a time, in the humanities, when one could “write off” bureaucratic exercises such as grant-application as a necessary evil, accepting them as a delimitable percentage of the job’s requirements that could still leave a margin of freedom for research of a less directed kind. But what I had learned to appreciate on this occasion was the actual level of deadening constraint entailed in such exercises today — a constraint that cannot but have a debilitating effect on the overall work of an academic. The forms I was filling out, I understood, were forming me. Of course, academics in the sciences and social sciences have been accustomed to such a regime for many

years (in almost all academic systems); for humanists, the imperative of grant-application is a relatively new development. We may smile at the quaint, protected existence humanists have enjoyed, and their discomfort today. But should the shock they now experience not rather reflect back upon the working conditions of those in the sciences and social sciences? To what “formative” forces have they accommodated their work? The question is rhetorical, of course, because we know that a very significant number of researchers in the sciences have conformed, almost without question, to the dictates of agendas stemming from business and government.

My point is simple: We cannot afford to ignore the damage done to the spirit by the incessant demand for conformity to an ever-more technocratic and instrumentalized system. The greatest danger to education in the contemporary university may lie in the gradual destruction of the “autonomy” of the faculty, the erosion of their capacity to perform freely and creatively (in teaching and in writing) from a deep and constantly nourished commitment to the meaning of their work. The becoming-functionary of the professoriat spells its ruin.

The threat to academic freedom takes many forms, some quite a bit more harsh than the one I have tried to illustrate. One can only imagine what will unfold in the Trump

era in North America. But I remain convinced that the technocratic administration of the academy in the era of neo-liberalism, an administration that has very little “liberal” about it, is in fact quite harsh indeed. For this reason, it is imperative that a new autonomy be won for teachers — an autonomy that can perhaps free the kind of teaching relation I have sought to describe in the earlier parts of this statement. The latter relation requires a completely different organization of ends (served by a wholly new freedom to experiment in temporalities without strict accounting) from the one now strengthening its grip on the contemporary academy.

- 1 The questions, as communicated to me, are the following:
1) A classical answer to the question ‘what is education?’, is often formulated in terms of its ideal purpose, namely that autonomy is the end that critical education strives towards. But this answer prompts us to ask: what does autonomy mean as an educational ideal? 2) The educational situation itself, insofar as it builds on a relation between students and an educational authority, raises questions towards the ideal of autonomy: How do autonomy and authority relate within education itself? And, how, by which processes, is the autonomy of the individual even made possible through the relation to an authority? 3) Autonomy is not only held as an internal ideal of education, classically the autonomy of the educational institutions have been held as a necessity in their external relations to society and politics. However, the nature of these relations poses recurring questions: how is education challenged by the contemporary demands of society and politics? Is it possible or sufficient still to maintain the idea of education

as autonomous? I will not try to adhere strictly to these three immense questions, though I will move through them as I would in response to a questionnaire. My hope is that the answers these questions have prompted will speak to the spirit of this collection.

- 2 The notion of establishing a foundation for higher education in the liberal arts has been slow to reach Europe, and the values invested in the liberal arts in the post-war American universities are now more remote than ever as a horizon for grasping the meaning of higher education. For a recent, succinct account of the way neoliberalism is eroding these values and undermining the very conception of the way training in the liberal arts might sustain the project of democracy, see Wendy Brown's *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015), particularly Chapter 6, "Educating Human Capital," 175-200. The ideological constructions at work in many liberal arts curricula in American universities must of course be subjected to sustained scrutiny. But the principles animating a liberal arts education ultimately point in the direction of the goals that I will seek to articulate with respect to a profoundly cross-disciplinary training at advanced levels. The curricular experiment I will describe radicalizes the notion of *Bildung* and thus the understanding of "autonomy" that is normally proposed as the end of liberal arts education. But I consider defense of the ideals instituted in undergraduate liberal arts programs to be of critical importance.
- 3 Gérard Granel, *De l'université* (Mauzevin: Trans-Europ Re-press, 1982), p 75-96.
- 4 *The Claim of Language: A Case for the Humanities* (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press, 2004). This volume has recently been translated into German by Katharina Martl and Johannes Kleinbeck: *Der Anspruch der Sprache: Ein Plädoyer für die Humanities* (Berlin: Turia + Kant, 2016). I draw the phrase "free use" from Friedrich Hölderlin, though I drop here his reference to a "proper" or "national."

- 5 I speak very allusively, here to be sure, and I would not help by saying that the evocation of a “real” forces us to look beyond the “public” relation to forms of exposure that exceed the political order. We touch here, of course, on a field of questions that are the purview of psychoanalysis, whose research is pertinent to all fields in the humanities, though no less in need of “complementation.”
- 6 This is why the common argument that “cross-disciplinarity presupposes disciplinarity” inherently dooms a genuinely cross-disciplinary endeavour. In fact, the need for the historically tempered knowledge afforded by a discipline is something that should ultimately appear *from* the exigencies of cross-disciplinary thinking. Every thinker will discover that rigorous cross-disciplinary work on questions of crucial social import requires what “discipline” can provide, but it is cross-disciplinary questioning that defines most effectively and meaningfully what is required of a discipline. If the methodological order I describe is not pursued, the discipline will inevitably reproduce its hegemony.
- 7 I seek to describe in this section an ideal pedagogical comportment. It goes without saying that not all professors at the EGS will incarnate this rare ideal, or do so on every occasion. I would add, in light of what I will go on to say in this section, that we have had masters who have remained incorrigibly so, and others who do not quite attain that stature. We have also had an impressive number of incredible successes. But my ambition here is merely to describe *what it would take* to realize the pedagogical ends of the experiment I am seeking to evoke, and what we strive constantly to achieve at the EGS.
- 8 I describe a form of “introduction” here, but clearly I am not describing an “introductory” course in the standard sense of this term. In many contexts, the latter, standard form of introduction is all an advanced student will receive before they are abandoned to their “independent” research (which will almost of necessity take a narrow form as the student strives to meet expectations that have been poorly communicated — this too is how disciplines can repeat themselves). At the EGS, in contrast, students begin immediately with the “advanced” form of fundamental questioning I seek to evoke here. This pedagogy is entirely feasible if the

teaching takes on the “public” character to which I have referred. The EGS works from the assumption that anyone can learn the habits of questioning required for fundamental research in a given field and thereby undertake such research if they are willing to make the effort and given the proper instruction. And given that students will undertake twelve seminars for each advanced degree, for the MA, *and for the PhD*, it will be apparent that the EGS is offering a very intensive and substantial form of training.

- 9 I refer here, principally, to Lyotard’s essay, “Address on the Subject of the Course of Philosophy,” in *The Postmodern Explained* (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press, 1993), 99-108. I have devoted several essays to Lyotard’s thinking about pedagogy and infancy, including “Jean-François’s Infancy,” in *Yale French Studies*, No. 99, 2001, 44-61, and “A Pedagogy on the Verge of Disaster,” in *Pedagogies of Disaster*, ed. Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei, Adam Staley Groves, Nico Jenkins (New York: Punctum Books, 2013) 37-66.
- 10 See Jean-François Lyotard, “The Other’s Rights,” trans. Chris Miller and Robert Smith in *On Human Rights* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 136-147. I have taken up Jacques Rancière’s response to this text in “Police Actions in Aesthetics: Rancière Reading Deleuze and Lyotard on Art,” forthcoming in a special issue of *Qui Parle* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).
- 11 The members of this group were Drs. Joan Forbes and Archie Graham, from the School of Education, and Edith Doron, from the Centre for Modern Thought.
- 12 I do want to note that one motive I have for telling this story is that I believe it is imperative to answer the question, “What is teaching today?” with reference to all levels of the educational process. The general devaluation of teaching (as a social role) in Western societies is an astonishing and widely lamented fact. But no less astonishing is the way teaching holds such a low status in higher education — not just in the evaluation of performance (every academic knows that research counts first) or in the importance given to it in academic programs, but in the attention given to it in research. A precious few devoted researchers are undertaking

this work, which is worthy of the highest respect. Those who do it from Schools of Education are also acutely aware, in many cases, that they are the poor cousins of their more fortunate colleagues in other parts of the academy. There are many deleterious effects of this devaluation of research in teaching, one of them being that the academy is poorly equipped to respond to the highly financed efforts of those promoting online learning and various forms of technological assistance.

- 13 Advocacy for the contemporary teacher in Scotland takes many forms: within the school, in conference with parents and other interested parties, in collaboration with other forms of children's service (medical care, for example — Scotland is seeking a broader coordination of such services, and teachers must be prepared to work closely with individuals from other fields), and in the broader professional or governmental contexts. In the UK, an older generation of leaders is followed by a strikingly thin cohort of successors.

NEW FACULTIES

(Art)Universities as Surprise Generators

Siegfried Zielinski

Translated from German by James Fontini

I.

Complete identification with the apparatus — aesthetically celebrated by Bertolt Brecht in 1928 as a premonition of a coming community of machines and humans in his interactive radio installation, “*Ozeanflug*” (‘Flight Over the Ocean’) — is now no longer an option, scarcely less than 90 years after the premiere. The great utopias are just as shattered and fragmented as the kakatopian constellations from which they were generated. We now have the possibility to say everything to everyone and to do so without interruption and everywhere — mercilessly. Yet, who actually considers in depth what he or she has to say? In Chris Petit’s powerful cinematic statement *Content* (2010), one of the young female protagonists says, in front of a web camera in a so-called social media platform: “Just once, for one day in my life, I would like to feel that I and everyone speaking to me, were talking full sense.” A second girl responds from another planet within the same networked universe: “I would like to fall in love before it’s too late, don’t care who with.” A third replies in

an immediate collision with this statement: “I would like a feeling of assignation to life, not sitting here calculating how many fucks I have got left. The middle-ground is hardly there anymore.”

We are still living in the transition from the 20th to 21st century. I am convinced of this: the new century will become the age *after* media. We, but above all the next generation, for whom we as intellectuals are jointly responsible, should prepare ourselves for this.

We have learned to believe in machines and artifacts, and artificial entities learn more and more to believe in us. They trust us, like those artifacts from Naples I name “Belief



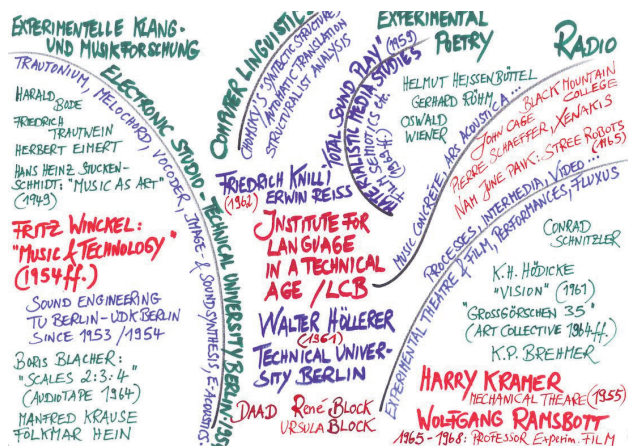
Belief machine, photo: Mono Krom

machines.” When you push a button on the keyboard, the electronic offering box lights a candle as a surrogate for our soul in the house of god, without first having inserted any money. The device assumes that we handle it correctly and we are not allowed to disappoint it. The more complex technical systems become, the more dramatic the relations between *media-humans* and *media-machines* behave at their intersection. The drama is nothing less than the insistence upon difference — from both sides.

I gain confidence in this drama by a similarly early insight: just as there is no political, aesthetic, or economic *a priori*, there is no technical *a priori*. Nietzsche did not claim that the typewriter could type thoughts on its own, as it were, from out of its steely heart and brain. This is something that our friend Friedrich Kittler would have misunderstood. Nietzsche said that the machine is co-writing our thoughts. That is a considerable difference of almost ontological relevance. In the first case art, knowledge, and design are mere effects. In the second case they are developed in a co-production of biofacts and artifacts. The second case, which for regular artistic research and the arts of knowledge most interests us, establishes a reciprocal relation between the instrumental [*dem Apparativen*] and the living, a non-trivial relationship between a set of regulations and the faculty of imagination. It is worthwhile to continue to work on this interdependency [*Wechselwirkung*] with the lofty aim of altering reality to its own benefit.

I owe my confidence in a possible bond between poetic and technological thinking and practice to the foundation of a small Gallic village in the middle of a giant technical university (Technische Universität Berlin), a true heterotopic place, as Foucault would say, the *Institut für Sprache im technischen Zeitalter* — Spritz (Institute for Language in the technological Age — Spritz).

Walter Höllerer founded the institute in 1961 as a response, if nothing else, to the building of the wall and the renewed intensity with which the propagandic standards of language



Original illustration, Siegfried Zielinski
Institut für Sprache im technischen Zeitalter - Spritz

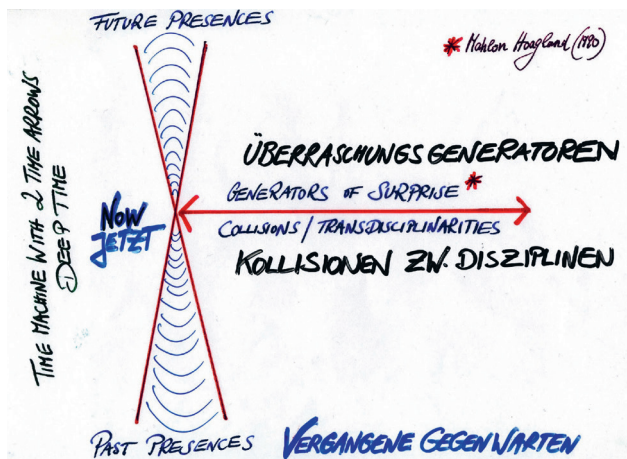
were molded. And I owe the idea of the non-trivial relationship between humans and artifacts to a mechanical engineer, radio poet, and film semiotician, Friedrich Knilli, together with whom I was able to establish the first media studies program in a German university in the 1970s. At that time, research and critical instruction in media was frowned upon in German academies and universities. The establishment of corresponding faculties was held as completely wayward and superfluous.

It was only in the 1980s that *Media* — especially digital media — became the cornerstone of progress, revolutions without sweat and blood, immeasurable prosperity and esteem. By the beginning of the 1990s at the latest, the digital was an analogue for the alchemical formula for gold. In the course of that decade, a paradigm shift again asserted itself — from poetizing and thinking to the elegant and eloquent pragmatism of arranging and directing [*Einrichtens und Lenkens*], exemplified in network culture by the shift from the digital folklore of the first internet euphoria to the newly elaborated economy of mass media Web 2.0.

We still find ourselves, at bottom, in this closing phase of the 20th century. To be sure, one can no longer make revolutions with media. It has become part of our everyday infrastructure, like the faucet one turns on to get the important things done (Günther Anders, Hannah Arendt's

first husband, had already anticipated this in the 1950s). By focusing on what actually and originally interests us in media phenomena, namely the wild and restless relationships between the arts, sciences, and technologies articulated in them, it is possible to begin anew.

As an an-archaeologist of the arts and media, I live in and with a time machine. Crafting future presences means, for me, to think through the sources of the fields of action for our knowledge, time and again anew, and to extract surprising variants from them. Presents both past and future are *potential spaces*, a beautiful concept from the



Original illustration, Siegfried Zielinski
Surprise generator

arsenal of the British psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott. They meet in the now of our being-active [*Aktivseins*]. This now, the opportune moment, can be conceived kairos-poetically as an inextensible time-space [*Zeitraum*], out of which the present is allowed to develop in the form of a surprise generator.

II.

The deeper I climb into my time machine of an archeology and variantology of the arts, the more strikingly clear it becomes to me that I myself must also move forcefully and horizontally into the heterogeneity of the cultures of knowledge and design [*Gestaltung*]. The territorial orientations suggested to us by continental-european philosophy are not sufficient for the coming centuries; they've run their course.

In the early 1990s the *Haus der Kulturen der Welt* (HKW) in Berlin came up with the idea to court, in a particular manner, the monster forming in the emergence of “information society”. They invited the Martinique-born, Paris-New York based poet-philosopher Édouard Glissant — the contemporary Empedocles of the Caribbean — to develop his idea of a “poetics of relation” for the discourse on the self-developing techno-political network-*dispositif*. I was

permitted to join Glissant at the podium for a discussion and, during the preparation for our dialogue, enjoyed a particular lesson that did more than just make clear that HKW's plan at the time would not work out. Glissant's lesson has remained for me an important reminder for another thinking of vast coherences.

Heinsprachigkeit

PRINCIPAUX TERMES

« Ein Lied von der Insel »
 » Zerlegte Welt
 » Die Gedanken der Nation
Édouard Glissant

La grande peur du Millénaire

Imprévisibilité *Nicht-vorhersehbarkeit der Welt*

Impredicible *Nicht-vor-sagbarkeit*

Chaos-monde *Chaos-Welt*

mit anderen uns mit dem anderen
 Nous changeons en échangeant avec l'autre, sans nous perdre.

Nous écrivons en présence de toutes les langues du monde

La mondialité *(Globalität) → Mondialität*

La mondialisation *Globalisierung (als Verunsicherung)*

La totalité-terre *Die ~~ganze~~ ALLWELT*

La gèhenne

Se penser en oblique, on en rayonnement

L'appartenance

La déportation *ungetrieben sein*

Les pensées du système

Les pensées archipéliques

La créolisation - Le tout-monde. *Kreolisierung*

Le monde se créolise

Les certitudes fécondes de l'Être

Les variances de l'État du monde

Mesure et démesure *Maß + Maßlosigkeit / Regellarbeit*

L'inattendu *Unerwartetes*

décroquer *Entkantung*

proliférant

Mischung + Entmischung (Xenagoras)

Keine Erinnerung, die sich ihrer selbst sicher ist

Humane / Humanität - europ. Konzept

Glissant had written me a list of concepts whose meanings and semantic neighborhoods he placed particular value on and which I returned for the discussion with my notations. At the center was his well-known concept of *creolization*, which he used to substantiate his idea of a poetics of relation. From this idea fields are derived, like those concerning the subtle, yet important distinction between *mondialité* (world coherence without a unification paradigm) and *mondialisation* (globalization as universalization), followed by clarification as to why this understanding is so important.

The Mediterranean Sea [*Mittelmeer*], our (he addressed me as a European) geographical jewel, designated by Hegel as the center [*Mittelpunkt*] of world history, would at the same time be our great problem. Hegel's designation does not indicate the function as mass grave assigned to the Mediterranean by centuries of various wars upon its waters and, in recent decades, by refugees from the poor and politically embattled regions of Africa.

Since time immemorial, all the longings of the continent, according to Glissant, were concentrated upon the once beautiful sparkling puddle in the middle of the African North, the Asian West, and the European South; and all universalisms, all political, ideological, economic, and religious ideas of unification were developed and

communicated on their coasts. *E pluribus unum* — out of many, one: what has been explicitly inscribed in the US Presidential crest refers back to the European source of the so-called new world emerging from the old. Its demand for universalization continued in the new world and established itself in recent decades as a specific ideology of freedom which does not tolerate dissent.

“Unique, eternal omnipresent, unseen and inconceivable God...!” With these words of Moses begins the libretto for the first scene in act one of Arnold Schönberg’s monumental opera, “*Moses und Aron*”; and the notion of the unique and all-powerful is immediately bound up with the ground upon which imagining moves. “...You stand upon holy ground”, calls the voice from the burning bush, “now proclaim!”.

In the Caribbean, on the other hand — according to Glissant — the *mare externum*, the ocean, unlike the *mare internum*, has no function of connection, but rather a function of separation.¹ Therein lies a different conception of the world-sea than the one developed by Deleuze & Guattari in *1000 Plateaus*. The *mare externum* is, in many respects, just as little a *smooth space* as the Mediterranean is a *striated space*. The territory in the region we call the Caribbean is shattered; the mighty water divides its scattered parts. The only unity familiar to the inhabitants of

the Caribbean runs along the ocean floor between Africa and the islands of Meso-America. The imaginary unity of this deep ground is notched and furrowed by the chains of the slave trade. (Again the chain appears here, the *nexus*, which played such an important role in the representation of electricity with regard to the powerful cohesion of opposites throughout early modernity and, above all, in the *theologi electrici* of the 17th and 18th centuries; but this is another theme.²) Glissant terms *creolization* the tactic of linking different territorial constituents and particularities. With this he aims at “a mix, [...] that the unforeseeable produces.”³ *Creole*, as is well known, is an extremely “hybrid language which has emerged out of the contact between different, diametrically-opposed linguistic traditions and structures. The francophone Creole languages of the Caribbean were formed from contact between the Breton and Norman dialects of the 17th century; one does not know the exact descent of its syntax, but one suspects it represents a kind of synthesis of languages that is essentially black African.” It is at once an imitation and a refraction that is ideally sung, similar to *Black American* in relation to the language of whites. (Just as James Joyce’s *Finnegans’s Wake* is primarily heard as something sung and not read.) His translator, Beate Thill, concretely outlines a few tactics of Glissant’s intervention: doubling of syllables, assonances, delayed metrics, deliberate rearrangement of vowels in particular

words...⁴ Such subversive tactics obviously do not permit the establishment of governing programs and administration, but rather compose living songs and poems. The one and the other are not the same.

“The origin [*Ursprung*] always precedes the fall. It comes before the body, before the world and time...”⁵: The simple yet useful account of the paths of philosophical knowledge given by Elmar Holenstein — Swiss philosopher based in Yokohama, Japan — allows one to distinctly recognize the dynamic development of the arts of knowledge [*Wissenskünste*] in the antique world in three local attractors, rather than one unique center: Alexandria, Athens, Milet. Al-Farabi — the great polymath of the Arabic-Islamic tradition before the turn of the first millennium, who also wrote a formidable, early encyclopedia of the sciences — constructed in the 10th century (of our calendar) a philosophy of world history which supplemented the dynamic triad with Baghdad; this allowed for a spiral-like construction of the representation of its development, which can be renewed all the way into modernity. It distinguishes itself fundamentally from the tiered, linear constructions favored by Hegel in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, which are erected upon dominance and which are entrusted to us by the European history of philosophy.

III.

For some time I have been making use of a trick in the form of a particular literary genre in order to briefly formulate what the change in the premises of thought means for work in universities, in which both knowledge of the arts and arts of knowledge have a home. I formulate — often times en route — short guidelines for the respective state of things and their possibilities of movement regarding the nervous relationships between the arts, technologies, and sciences. The items change constantly, necessarily so. The most recent variant consists in 31 points from which I have selected only a few for this textual intervention. They are meant to help me ground new faculties, a task I hold to be both necessary and desirable.

1. Projects like universities and academies have a historical beginning, development, and finite duration. Otherwise they would not be definable. The free will, also the artistic will, develops from the insight and feeling that the experienceable world, including that of a university, is constricting and full of fractures, irritations, inaccessibilities, and dissonances. It is one of the privileges of art to be able to productively transform the suffering caused by the experienceable world through the process of designing [*Prozess des Gestaltens*]. Artistic energy means the capability to transgress the finitude of our existence into

a more open pluriverse (a wayward [*eigenwillig*] dialogue with god). “Organizzar il trasumanar” — to organize the transgression of the limit — with this beautiful paradox, Pasolini paraphrases his activity as poet, painter, and filmmaker.

2. The opposition between a defined framework — which one could also designate psychically as consciousness — and the creative scope [*Gestaltungsspielraum*] of singular actors is not a matter of an irresolvable contradiction. It is much more about a tension-rich complementarity in contrasts. The one is not thinkable without the other. The freedom of the singular will not only agree with the idea of a joined world [*gefügte Welt*], it lives in it. This should also be valid for the particularly pieced together world of a university.

3. I understand the concept of freedom primarily as a quality of experience. The free will — particularly the will through which fantasy enters into aesthetic action — realizes itself only in that I become active, in that I think, judge, design, struggle, love. What the arts of design and knowledge essentially amount to in this perspective can be inscribed briefly and pointedly in one sentence: namely, the unconditional talent and ability to choose what my will actually [*wirklich*] wants. Expressed otherwise: The free will to alter reality [*Wirklichkeit*] to its own benefit is the

medium through which the sub-jected [*das Unterworfene*] (the subject) most intensely realizes itself as a pro-jector [*Entwerfer*]. Artists and designers are projectors. What they project are, in felicitous cases, projected worlds, and thus worlds that are different from the one in which we live.

7. In cases of doubt and available choice, a decision for possibility, *potentia*, is more expedient than a pragmatic preference for reality. Spaces of possibility such as the Karlsruhe University of Art and Design are distinct in that we can think them, project them, and yet never reach their ideal; but also in that we can take risks because we favor them, wish for them, passionately want them. We work in factories and workshops that deal in illusions. I learned from Dietmar Kamper that the verb *illudere* does not only entail the production [*erzeugen*] of a beautiful image [*Schein*] but also entails taking a risk, venturing something in its most extreme form.

11. Even when the shift we're in a position to create is only made up of nanoseconds, the most urgent task for artists of time-design is to give back to those who experience and enjoy our works something of the time that life has stolen away from them. This necessitates that we grant ourselves the time that art and thinking as experiment require.

12. Outside of the thick of things: all revolutions and innovations have been generated from the outskirts [*aus der Provinz*]. Movements in the between-spaces and on the periphery have higher grades of freedom and enjoyment and carry more surprises within themselves. They do not exclude occasional excursions through the center to other edges. Exactly the opposite: an existence on the periphery is only recommended when one knows the quality of the center.

14. Machines and the imaginative faculty need not form irreconcilable contradictions. The *homo artefactus* of the 21st century can use them as two distinct, complementary possibilities to understand the world, to disassemble it and reassemble it. One only penetrates the highest spheres of the programmed world through the forces of perception [*Vorstellung*] and imagination [*Einbildung*]. Conversely, fantasy [*Phantasie*] and imagination [*Imagination*] are well advised when they do not unnecessarily get rid of calculation and computation. Convenient approaches have lost nothing in the advanced arts.

19. The most urgent and at the same time most difficult task to realize for all the arts is still to make or to hold sensitively for the other, for that which is not identical with us, and indeed with the particular means available to us, namely, the aesthetic. That will not change no matter which technologies and medias we express ourselves through.

IV.

Along with Emmanuel Levinas, I understand the future as that which stubbornly refuses to show itself to us, as that which is principally inaccessible. But we can — to put it like thinkers like Bloch or Flusser — dream forwards. The dream is a vast time machine, perhaps the most powerful, over which we have no enduring command. This time machine withdraws from the grasp of cognition just as effectively as from the grasp of conscious action [*bewussten Handelns*].

From the fragmented considerations outlined above, an *imaginary academy* emerges on the horizon, one not unlike Italo Calvino's *imaginary cities*, in that there would be numerous factors which are not to be instituted because they escape installation; which are not to be understood from university chairs, because one cannot sit them out. They are too complex for that. They are rather fields of energy, motivation and irritation, faculties in the best sense of the word — in the indissoluble unity of *poeisis* and intuition [*Anschauung*], of “making”, [*Machen*] and theory. I would like to see to the formation of the following faculties:

DIGNITY

The most important faculty in general. (Also one of the oldest faculties in Europe indeed, founded in Glasgow in the 15th century.) To this faculty belongs, among other

things, an insistence upon speaking with one another, looking one another in the eyes in praise and in quarrel, and seeking the solution to confrontation in direct dialogue. We have nothing better. *Dia-logos*, the exchange of rational thoughts both within and outside of networks, is essential for survival. It presupposes the attention of the other. Trans- and interdisciplinarity have become, in general, mere compensatory concepts which manage a lack of dialogue with what is each time other.

UNUSUAL MEASURES

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, German artist Kurt Jotter founded an activist group in West Berlin that performed interventionist art under this concept. They referred to themselves as the Office for Unusual Measures [*Büro für ungewöhnliche Maßnahmen*]. Their most important sphere of activity was urban communications, particularly under the condition of self-asserted telematic relations. Throughout the 20th century there were always comparable groups, from SPUR to the Situationists. They will always be needed to intervene into saturated relations and irritate comfortable harmonies. Under the conditions of the developing networks of communication and the increasing technologization of our ways of life, such unusual measures can for example be articulated as a faculty, which we name along with artist-activists Julian Oliver, Daniil Vasiliev and Gordan Savicic

CRITICAL ENGINEERING

By this we understand an activity which is as equally constructive in a critical, theoretical sense as it is in a practical sense, an activity which is a consequence of interventionary thinking and which is appropriate to elaborately networked machines. It is thus able to take artifacts and the systems into which they are bound and reinterpret them or repurpose them in an unfamiliar way. This means to estrange them from their original purpose and to thereby organize contemporary dis-associations against and within immersive, consumer-oriented strategies. Such a faculty is tied closely to techno- and poeiticological work on

UNCENSORABLE SYSTEMS

which represents the greatest challenge for the arts and design of the next decade. For the occasion of our international conference “Potential Spaces” in February 2017, the Chinese media theorist, Gao Shiming, dean of the School of Intermedia Art (SIMA) at the Chinese Academy of Art, surprised us with the first draft of his “Hacking Media/ Art Manifesto”, which can also be seen as defining his position on his future activities in Hangzhou. In this text he pleads for an artistic praxis he names “Neo Media/ Art”. This praxis would appropriate the same information technologies through which mechanisms of domination in advanced capitalism are realized in the politics and

control of data. According to Gao, it is only through a critical application of these technologies against their own surveillance and control mechanisms that such mechanisms can be laid bare: “Neo Media/Art has to make the media in our hand the most incisive and controversial content, thereby resisting against the new technologies of control and seduction.”

We should focus especially on the management of

CHAOS-PILOTS and KAIROS-POETS

When creativity becomes a fundamental social competence under the banner of enhanced possibilities of media-humans and media-machines and the traditional model of the artist empties into art itself—but above all advances as a guiding model of social action—then it is at least prudent to work on supplementary identities. The life skills increasingly required of artists and intellectuals of the future are already graspable as tactical figures that do not let themselves be turned into strategies: Chaos-Pilots and Kairos-Poets are those who are in a position not only to deal with unforeseeable complexities [*Unübersichtlichkeiten*], but also to organize them, those who can snatch up opportune moments (in the movie theater, on the internet, on the stage, in the gallery, in the

concert hall, in the museum) and charge them energetically. Without an attitude towards complexity and an attitude towards time — both are linked inseparably — advanced thinking and aesthetic praxis are no longer imaginable.

Just as we artists, designers and thinkers are required to be in a position to intervene into these temporal structures that circumvent our perception in the slightest of ways (as in high-frequency trading), we thinkers and poets are required to overrun time-space-perceptions in the largest sense (as in astrophysics). I name this faculty

PALEOFUTURISM

This faculty would be exceptionally suited to investigating and developing the spaces of possibility of past and future presents and, from there, to generating surprises, essential to survival, in the relationships between media-humans and media-machines.

In the same manner, I advocate a re-start, a pataphysical project as an elaborated

CULTURA EXPERIMENTALIS

In early modernity, alchemical theory and praxis served the self-understanding of a becoming, uncertain, floating subject, which wanted to set itself in a relation over and against the other, the not or not yet understood — including nature and technology — which was both rational and exciting. The cosmos rustled and to listen to it was intoxicating. It projected itself acoustically over the things of nature and through the hearing organs into the souls of the adepts. They had decided to take part in the world rather than merely observe it. Alchemy understood as a new model for world-experience [*Welterfahrung*] and world-processing [*Weltbearbeitung*] did not point back to a magical past but rather forward to a possible future. My idea of a *cultura experimentalis* feels at home in this tradition as an exact (as possible) philology of precise (not perfect) things. Artifacts and their linkages are read not only as testimonies of a long-since past, that is, examined archaeologically, but also with view towards understanding the “play that begets the new” [*Spiel der Hervorbringung von Neuem*], which Rheinberger designates today as scientific experiment.⁶ Thus artifacts are read in anticipation. Our An-archeology is pro-spective.⁷

Alchemy was “a dream one could only eavesdrop upon and, to tell of it, one could only stammer. As humans were no longer in a position to dream of their kilns and listen in on matter itself, the dream of alchemy retreated into the night.”⁸ That experiment is worthwhile which activates

the dream of alchemy renewed at the present level of our knowledge of the world. This would correspond to those *cultura experimentalis* I have repeatedly sketched out for the arts. The cosmic, or whatever we want to call the general [*das Allgemeine*], which is indispensable for producing the identity of the singular, articulates itself manifoldly in things, in the ways in which they have been joined together, mixed, or formed. It is up to us to make speak, sing, hum, and stammer that which things themselves are not aware of. The things themselves will take care of the rest, namely for their inter-objective relationships.

WHENCE AND WHITHER BLOW THE WINDS?

If we take the challenge of a non-territorial orientation of our worldview seriously, we will not fail, in the long run, to place anew in the foreground of our anticipatory attentiveness [*vorausschauenden Aufmerksamkeit*] the capabilities of knowledge about winds and navigation. This faculty was already decisive in times when the relations of exchange between knowledges, goods, and cultural experiences were still essentially generated by ships and boats. They will now become essential components of future knowledge. From a pacific or oceanic perspective, the issue [*Sachverhalt*] would be once again interpreted quite differently as a “relocation into the open” (Dietmar Kamper). The courage and techniques required

for navigation across great distances into the seemingly borderless and the definitively unmasterable are distinct from those needed in proximity and immediate struggle...

By no means should we ever cease to experiment with

PROJECTIONS OF ALTERNATIVE WORLDS

and to work together on the realization of a limitless

HOSPITALITY

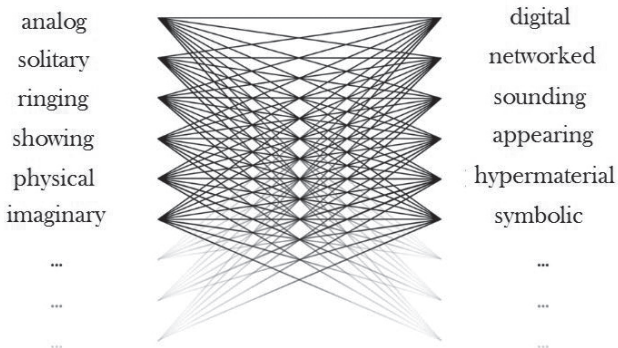
as an essential component of an *unconditional university* in the Derridian sense.

There are endless models available to us in art, in media and in thought, in which such faculties can operate effectively. That we use them, how we use them, and in which connections we use them, depends on us.

Faced with digital-telematic relations, in the foundational years of the new universities between Cologne and Karlsruhe, with the French Les Fresnoy and the Japanese Ogaki-shi, in the beginning of the 1990s, we were eagerly engaged in making the impossible possible. Much of this has been achieved with regard to technologically based communication. Today the arts and design depend more

MODI OPERANDI

Art / Design / Thinking



and more upon confronting what has everywhere and at every time become possible with its distinct impossibilities. This, for me, is artistic and theoretical practice *after* media. A number of the old, venerable, and pillared academies have long since made way for light and easy education containers [Bildungscontainern], like those realized for large sums globally by master architects such as Bernard Tschumi or Daniel Libeskind. However, objectified knowledge increasingly emigrates out from the solid architectures of libraries and archives; its mediation escapes into ubiquitous, fluid, and networked constellations. Consequently the question arises as to whether or not future generations will still learn in universities or academies. Perhaps that passage in the lives of young people that one names

‘studies’ will be realized as something like the following: highly mobile, flexible, wandering, and knowledge hungry individuals searching for the fragments necessary for any individual knowledge or design blog from those floating freely together in art, science, and diverse technologies, docking occasionally at creative studios, ateliers, and thought spaces in order to load themselves with new energies, incessantly debating the attained interim results of the development of their projects with others online and eventually allowing them to be reviewed via powerful imaginary knowledge depositories in order to see whether or not they have earned the credits necessary for a certificate entitling a nomadic existence to say: I have successfully studied.

- 1 In a short paragraph regarding the sea in his Lectures on the Philosophy of World History, Hegel accentuates not only the sea's fundamental limitlessness and its provocative character but also its ambivalent implications in the form of a psychogeography: "The sea awakens his courage; it lures him on to conquest and piracy, but also to profit and acquisition." G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, trans.H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge, 1975), p. 160.
- 2 I have treated the phenomenon of theologi electrici briefly in connection with Walter Benjamin and his relationship to Johann Wilhelm Ritter in: Bernd Witte, Mauro Ponzi (Ed.), *Theologie und Politik. Walter Benjamin und ein Paradigma der Moderne*, Berlin 2005. (An English translation is planned by Minnesota University Press)
- 3 Édouard Glissant, *Kultur und Identität. Ansätze zu einer Poetik der Vielheit* (Heidelberg, 2005), p. 81.
- 4 Ibid. (Kultur und Identität) p. 80.
- 5 Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rainbow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), p. 79.
- 6 Cited in the same, *Experimentalsysteme und epistemische Dinge*, p. 27.
- 7 [Trans. note: Its scope or vision is directed in front of itself.]
- 8 H. E. Fierz-David, *Die Entwicklungsgeschichte der Chemie*, p. 132.

WHAT IS EDUCATION? — A CRITICAL ESSAY

Steen Nepper Larsen

Wer ein WARUM zum Leben hat, erträgt fast jedes WIE.
- Friedrich Nietzsche

§ 0. *What is education?* The answer to this basic and inevitable question must first be expressed through a homemade and multifaceted paraphrase of the intrusive, hegemonic and transnational consensus-enforcing machinery and boilerplate supranational narrative of education today. My intention is not only to voice a Danish educational perspective, but to dare to survey the broader educational landscape from on high. In a sense, this endeavour is tantamount to a critical infiltration, allowing a philosophizing, sociologizing, and politicizing reflection to take shape through an anticipatory and almost self-unfolding counter-narrative.

The initial paraphrase will be faceless and without references; one could easily have laid forth mountains upon mountains of national and international policy papers, supplemented by an exposition on almost a century of mainstream educational ideas, beginning with Émile Durkheim's *Éducation et sociologie* from 1922. Equally

relevant to our account would be to add a dollop of neo-classical economic theory recounting society's lucrative investments in human capital from the 1960's and onwards in attempting to improve labor productivity. The omnipresent and all-conquering paradigms of economic theory which dominate current educational policy and planning — *rational choice theory*, *principal-agent theory*, *allocative efficiency*, *benchmarks*, and measures of *aggregate lifetime earnings* — will be left in the wings for now. But let's cut to the chase and/or *zur Sache selbst* as you say in German(y).

An educational continuum has emerged, whereby children in daycare centres have been integrated within the educational system. This is all the more remarkable considering that daycare centres, or primary schools for that matter, were not considered educational institutions until the latter stages of the 20th century.¹ In Denmark, the notion of education was to a far greater extent used in reference to the acquisition of a professional or vocational qualification. People were educated as craftsmen, dentists, or mechanical engineers. Education was primarily reserved for a specific stage in a young man's life (and it was almost invariably a man) preparing him for adulthood — a rite of passage.

Today, education as a category has been inflated and subsumed under the truism that modern (wo)man will never be finished with his or her education once and for all. We are living in an educative discourse.²

The principal purpose of the education system is to shape the competitive workforce of the future and to condition the individual for participation in society's division of labor. Education is the production of subjects; typically in the form of a drawn-out process of institutionalized socialization. The norms and demands of society are to be instilled, while pupils and students learn to behave and govern themselves in an appropriate manner. Education is centered on the appropriation of knowledge, skills, and competences, but also on shaping the moral, social, and creative forces of the individual.

Education is — in principle, at least — a means to an end: to prepare the workforce for entry to the labor market and ensure the maximal number of years of work (ideally 40-45 years), and the highest possible aggregate lifetime earnings. This perception of education is advocated by economists, politicians, educational administrators and managers, and leading educational researchers.

The educational system performs two tasks simultaneously. First, it nurtures national citizenship, whereby individuals learn to speak and write in a certain lingo — tied together by a series of more or less sanctioned stories upheld to assert the belief in a national territory and culture. Second, it schizophrenically tells these citizens to embrace a *global outlook* in order to stay competitive in the international marketplace of present-day global capitalism. It has become our duty to learn and to keep learning

throughout our lives. Education can and must no longer be finite: we must learn to read, calculate, write, and speak in English, and to keep developing our competences until we are six feet under. The educational system shapes our will to lifelong learning, but also functions as a selective 'machine', rewarding exceptional performance and talent. The educational system hereby serves as an ineluctable arena for both recognition and disapproval. Students' abilities must be measurable and distinguishable; curiosity and interest are not enough to give the motivated student access to the education of her dreams. One's papers must be in order and the gates are closed without a sufficiently high GPA.

Within capitalism, the purpose of the educational system is to increase the value of human capital.³ In the fierce competition of global markets, knowledge has become both a commodity and a productive force: education plays a pivotal role in the production of knowledge, meaning that the primary and secondary levels of schooling (preschool and K-12) are purported to build the foundation for the tertiary level (professional and academic degrees). Nation states around the world, not least of which those in Europe, participating in the global capitalist economy are competing to (re-)design and maintain the best and most effective educational systems.

National educational systems, educational institutions, and individuals all learn that any educational content consists of contingent phenomena in an ever-changing,

provisional, and adaptable world. Most educational programs have been subject to desubstantialization, and are now receiving facelifts in the form of the introduction of new teaching modules centered on learning objectives tailored to the labor market. Underlying the current desubstantialization is an infringement on the foundational core of the academic disciplines, a splitting up of the academic substance into disparate modules, and a reduction of the allowed period of study.

§ 1. Before we lose our wits completely — and to offer more than a reiteration of the many valiant attempts to condense and analyze the commanding narrative and almost ubiquitous reality of education as presented in § 0 — we must think of education in a radically different manner.

We will begin by questioning the *what-ness* of education, or more precisely its *ontology*; i.e., how education exists in the world. For the sake of clarity, we will examine the characteristics of two prevailing and conflicting strategies in the politics of knowledge⁴ that, each in their own way, strongly influence how education is perceived; an *ontology of deficiency* (in German: *Mangelontologie*) and an *ontology of excess*. The two strategies are initially represented by their ideal forms in § 2 and § 3, although they are unlikely to appear in such pure form in the murky and pragmatic reality of everyday life.

At a later point in this missive (§ 7), I will inquire from an existential-ontological and phenomenological perspective into education's role and how it is experienced by the individual, although the answers to such questions — bearing in mind the heterogeneity and indeterminate nature — are near unfathomable. The perpetual plurality of people (*in pluralis*) beseeches us to avoid conclusions based on singularity; the time for Robinsonades is over (or at least it ought to be).

In the intermediate paragraphs, I intend to make clear why the question *what is education* necessitates a discussion of purpose — rather than a retreat to the myopic newspeak of learning-targets and effective learning which seems to be the central concern of propagators of the education discourse outlined in § 0.

§ 2. By *ontology of deficiency*, I refer to a cosmology of being — a philosophical anthropology and sociology — that notoriously perceives human beings as a timid, unprotected species, lacking natural instincts, but nevertheless a unique species, equipped with a consciousness and the capacity for self-reflection and introspection. Education, then, is conceived as a form of compensation and as a dubious way of earning the love and recognition of others. In accordance with the ideas of the German sociologist Arnold Gehlen, were the human species fully developed at birth, we would have no use for the crutches

of socialization, pedagogical interventions, and educational institutions surrounding us from the day we are born. A self-reliant existence would have no need for teachers and educators (in Denmark one might talk about pedagogues); the autonomous I would, so to speak, be her own father and mother from the day she is born.

Education is not and can never be *the real thing*. Indeed, as expounded by Lars Henrik Schmidt, former dean of the Danish School of Education (1999-2007), the very existence of education is nothing less than a violation of the individual's omnipotence — albeit he or she does not possess nor master this autonomous power and the tragic condition for human existence is that omnipotence is only accessible to the individual through the intermediacy of thought (see *Diagnosis I-II-III*, Copenhagen: DPI, 1999). In the perspective of the *ontology of deficiency*, then, human beings undertake an education to gain comfort and security due to this existential angst. Born into the world without protective fur, strong predatory teeth or muscular super powers, and with no possibility of controlling the social sphere — or renouncing the battlefield of the subconscious that rests within us — we are doomed to be educated. Being educated is, as such, a plan B of ontological purpose that we cannot relinquish. In this sense, within the horizon of ontological deficiency, the idea of human beings 'undertaking' an education is seductive, yet misleading; education, learning, and pedagogics are

inexorable destinies for the species *in carentia* (in Latin: *cura*), as delineated by Gehlen and Schmidt. We are, in other words, condemned to supplanted realities so long as we remain unable to stand on our own two feet and establish a path through life free from socialization.

The premise for asserting the ontology of deficiency is that this weakness is sustained by the educational system, allowing only its most fortunate, eloquent, and skillful participants to master the narrative and someday, perhaps, themselves become its authors.

§ 3. By *ontology of excess*, I once again refer to a cosmology of being, a philosophical anthropology and sociology, that construes the ‘incomplete’ nature of a human being — the plasticity of the human brain, the unknown future of the individual life, and the polyplural opportunities to be ‘spoiled’, indulged and inspired by other people in the slipstream of communicative systems — as a formidable and unique privilege of the species.

In the universe of the ontology of excess, educational systems are measured by their ability to supply human existence with as many opportunities as possible to *practice* in intelligent and phylogenetically advantageous ways. Here, the educational system serves the people and not vice versa. The individual is equipped with an impermanent and incomplete ‘first nature’, and each individual is given the possibility of revolting against the procedures that are

set in motion to discipline and control the second nature of pupils and students. Thus subjectified, the individual is enabled to disrupt the system.

It follows that the ontology of excess negates the perception of education and teaching as compensatory. Rather, the process of education plays a pivotal role in shaping human biology (in concrete terms: the quality of synaptic neural couplings, motor functions, perception, angst-free movement, etc.) and individual 'style' (including the possible scope for thought, argumentation, and action). In addition, of course, there are the equally important functions of constituting, maintaining, and transforming social ties between members of the species (including ethics, structures of expectation, implicit and explicit forms of acknowledgement, logical and rhetorical rules for argumentation, etc.).

As pointed out in the works of the German philosopher and anthropologist of practice (in German: *Übungsanthropologe*), Peter Sloterdijk (e.g. *Sphären 1. Blasen. Mikrosphärologie*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1988), among others, human beings are consigned to the help of others (starting with their parents). And indeed, this need to interact (breast in mouth, gruel, caresses, vicariousness, warm clothes, temperate baths, cave-like comforters, tranquility, and soft lighting) is an essential goad for developing the will and determination to engage in extra-familial socialization and education.

From our travels through the micro-, meso-, and macro-spheres (to use a concrete example: the childhood home, the municipal high school, and the study program in a foreign country) flows a cornucopia of possibilities for existence *in excessu*; albeit this surplus-oriented position makes no pretention of denying that the varying conditions of life matter a great deal in terms of determining the (unequally distributed) life opportunities of human beings across the globe.

The premise for asserting the ontology of excess is a fundamental normativity underlying the educational system's *raison d'être*, implying that its qualities must above all be judged according to its 'ability' to contribute to life improvements (both on an individual and societal scale) and on the ability to provide each individual with the possibility of mastering his or her life in freedom. The educational system, in other words, must provide human beings with the opportunity to initiate praiseworthy practices, while at the same time opening pupils and students' eyes to the destructive, deleterious, and threatening aspects of the process of civilization.

Several ontologies of excess have surfaced throughout the history of ideas; from the prescientific postulates of humanists and enlightenment scientists to Friedrich Nietzsche's writings in the late 19th century (*Über die Zukunft unsere Bildungsanstalten*, 1872), and the American anarchist Murray Bookchin's *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*

(Ramparts Press, 1971). People opting for the ontologies of excess are notoriously post-scarcity thinkers and if they want to maintain their 'position' and utopian élan they have to keep up the counterfactual and uncontemporary spirit in harsh (testing) times in which they risk to be regarded as outmoded and obsolete.

§ 4. Proponents of both ontologies of deficiency and of excess are somewhat trying acquaintances: neither is well-suited to the current educational jargon of learning objectives, best practice, self-assessment, and evidence-based teaching.⁶ Both regard the incessantly propagated institutional practices and techniques to be a fundamental abuse and subjugation of the freedom of pupils and students. There are, however, more differences than similarities between the two ontologies.

Ontologists of deficiency can be remarkably petulant due to their incessant portrayal of what they see as the many *negativa* as an inexorable, profane condition for human existence. The *a priori* verdict is unrelenting and resounding: you are weak, you are scared, you cannot escape, you *must* go to school... Ontologies of deficiency are self-affirming constructions whose proponents even find solace in seeing their position 'proven' when empirical life, both their own and that of others, does not quite go to plan. "See, we told you so: we are a deficient species!" What is more, our journey through life's institutions

(such as schools and universities) is pre-classified as merely symbolic and inauthentic.⁷ Hardcore proponents of an ontology of deficiency, who are, in fact, few and far between, simply forgo any ambition on others' behalf, whether generational or among their peers. It is of no use when, fundamentally, they can neither teach nor counsel anyone out of deficiency. They are relegated to the role of a feeble educator who pupils and students have every right to reject. This doesn't mean, however, that they are not offended if others fail to understand their views.

Being around or forced to listen to proponents of an ontology of excess, meanwhile, can be a quite agonizing experience. All too often, they come across as well-intentioned preachers of the gospel of opportunity — making it difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish them from the contemporary wave of positive psychologists and apostles of self-realization that market themselves and their agenda by imploring their audience to think positively, say yes to life, enroll in various courses of self-realization, and apply an array of self-branding techniques. Furthermore, they seldom hesitate in presenting their asinine thoughts in the form of a book.

Ontologists of excess underline the necessity of reading major works in their entirety — preferably in three languages — without the incentive of instant gratification in the form of higher grades or a better salary after completing one's studies. These ontologists cannot

see what they cannot see — let alone what it is that enables them to see. As such, their grandiose ideals for each and every one of us to take on the role as an intellectual critic of society, seem an impossible and unrealizable dream among both the young pupils, who are heavy consumers of the attention-grabbing distractions of social media, and the students at ‘short-spirited’, module-structured mass universities.

§ 5. And so, we can assert the disparate, not to say antithetical and prodigiously dipolar, natures of our two ontologies. However, it is also worth noting their similarities in that both are philosophically and sociologically narrated, and both have strong implications for our understanding and design of society’s educational institutions and appertaining pedagogics.

‘Speculators’ from both ontologies — being spokesmen for either the ontology of deficiency or of the ontology of excess — would doubtless agree on the limits of the epistemological (i.e., scientific positions mapping out a subject’s knowledge about an object) and empirical-scientific, data-collected, and efficaciously-oriented approaches to the question of what education is and how education ought to be. In addition, both positions undauntedly champion a normative approach to the question of education and both are grounded in notions and thoughts of the historically and socially differing constituents of human nature.

The speculations about human nature should not, however, be construed simply as old variations of the following two, more or less inescapable, questions: Are humans good or evil prior to socialization? Are humans born sinful or as blank slates? Nevertheless, it is striking how nature is simultaneously positioned as the argument and the premise for a series of thoughts and stipulations about the human condition and education's *why-ness*.

§ 6. While the contemporary hegemonic educational narrative (see § 0) might coincidentally brave its way into discussions of means and ends — as if the educational system were a pool table with legislators and school leaders as cues, teachers as balls, and students as pins — it would be an exceptionally rare occurrence if the *purpose* of education were to be discussed in public. The question: “why education?” simply isn’t asked. Educational economists and politicians are generally content to demand greater effectivity and efficiency for their investments into the system. God forbid that we end up producing unemployed graduates, or that we have the gall to apply scientific and substantial (i.e. non-desubstantialized) arguments for the existence of academic disciplines and different forms of knowledge.

Consequentially, discussions of purpose are lost in the fog or relegated to the fallow corners of the mind. Not only has it been decided that we are all to play pool

— rather than, say, golf, basketball, or badminton — but also exactly which rules we are to follow and who is allowed to participate.

For this author, it seems both impossible and incongruous to reduce the purpose of offering and undertaking an education to means (technologies of control, compulsion, enrollment procedures, economic incentives, scholarships etc.) and ends (to produce employable and competitive individuals) — not least due to the at once general and specific character of educational purpose: historically created, constitutive, idea-generated, and guiding. Critically investigating discussions of purpose elevates the phenomenon of education to a sphere in which it becomes possible to clarify *why* — but naturally also *how*, certain people have intended *something* with *someone* for centuries. And it becomes possible to determine how these intentions have been embellished with an array of arguments for their legitimacy.⁸

Of course, I have no pretension of presenting a complete mapping of educational purpose within the frame of this essay; yet this should not prevent a tentative thesis from taking shape. Perhaps the purpose of education is an inherently incomplete project — something that takes place under the radar, something contrafactual...

Let me hasten to add an explanatory stage direction: the presentation of the ontology of deficiency in § 2, and the ontology of excess in § 3, in no way purports to imply

that these positions are as equally significant and powerful as the hegemonic master-narrative of education presented in § 0. Rather, they serve as invitations for the reader to ponder two fundamental questions that are seldom posed and even more seldom result in unexpected answers: *what* and *why* education?

Critical thinking and philosophy are many ‘things,’ but not least — as Immanuel Kant phrased it in 1784 — the ability and courage to think and use one’s mind (intellect, reasoning...) independently, without the direction of others.⁹ Moreover, critical thinking can contribute to and qualify public debates in society (*res publica*), and philosophy, with its courage to both create new concepts and reinvigorate outmoded ones by adding new layers of meaning, can serve to generating previously un(fore)seen analytical mappings.

§ 7. Unlike our English-speaking colleagues, as speakers of Germanic languages (Danish and German), we are privileged in our ability to distinguish between ‘uddannelse’ and ‘dannelse’, between ‘Ausbildung’ and ‘Bildung’, as is distinctly possible in the ‘germanophile’ part of the world.¹⁰ It is a much more difficult task to advocate such a distinction in English, where ‘education’ is often linked to concepts such as ‘culture’ and ‘edification’, or French, where *éducation* is commonly used to denote the moral or practical aspects of child-raising (e.g. *l’éducation morale* as

the formation of character, as e.g. the English philosopher John Locke also wrote about back in 1693 in the classic *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*).

Bearing this distinction in mind, we are in a position to more clearly perceive what we otherwise risk losing sight of when education is embroiled in questions of functionalistic servility and efficacy to secure a productive workforce for the future of society (human capital). What is at risk are the ‘inner’ elements of education: the student’s *distinctive ontology* and the *hermeneutic-interpretative horizon* that always reaches beyond contemporary educational agendas.¹¹ We must endeavor to retain these ‘inner’ elements; using the Germanic expressions, to protect ‘dannelse’ in ‘uddannelse’, ‘Bildung’ in ‘Ausbildung’.

Despite what some may claim in their functionalist reductionism, undertaking an education is always a matter of experiencing. Educational life is first-hand phenomenology for those living it; education presents itself as something that shapes your working life, but also your self-image and imagination. You are introduced, so to speak, to new ways of perceiving yourself the moment you devote yourself to an education. In this sense, an educational life is — ideally, at least — at once a creative and unpredictable process which, to the dismay of the most tenacious and unbending among us, risks plunging the student into a highly challenging and even painful transformation (or complete rejection) of her existing

worldviews. It is inherently risky to expose oneself to radical transformational processes. Returning home afterwards to old friends, places, or family can, for example, be difficult and challenging, with an air charged of mutual alienation. All of a sudden, one has become unrecognizable and unable to communicate on the same wavelength.

If we view the student's educational activity from a processual, existentialist-phenomenological perspective,¹² it seems possible to step beyond and transcend the two antithetical ontologies expounded in §§ 2-5. Laying all my cards on the table, however, it should be said that I have a greater fondness for the ontology of excess than that of deficiency.

From this existentialist-phenomenological and excess-ontological perspective, the student is no longer an empty vessel, waiting to be filled with a given curriculum, or a *tabula rasa* to be covered in scribbled learning objectives and course requirements, despite the impression one might get through exposure to the rationales and enforced demands of educational policy as presented in § 0.

Ideally, at least, education can only occur through the self-transcending and self-realizing conquest of new areas of knowledge and through the acquisition of new ways to think, speak, learn, analyze, and write. Some of these words might even find their way into the occasional toast at casual get-togethers; much unlike the pragmatic appropriation of job-ready and applicable *lingua productiva* within the current, dominant discourse in education policy and politics

(cf. § 0). The French philosopher Jacques Rancière would agree and proclaim: Whoever teaches without emancipating stultifies.¹³

The purpose of education is also, on an entirely different scale, to provide mankind with original ways of communicating with one another, with the voices of the past, and with the generations to come. Indeed, I would go so far as to argue that it is nothing less than our goddamn duty and wonderful obligation to acquire just some of the many traces and interpretations of human activity from different periods and other parts of the world. What we referred to earlier as *Bildung* — i.e. the edification and the eloquent formation of the individual's character, wisdom, judgment, and fertile curiosity — is essentially a matter of training one's attentiveness, developing the art of decentralization and focal reorientation. Successful educational processes teach you how to take a small step to the side and ask, bravely, insistently, and without hesitation: where do we come from? how have we become who we are? why do we think as we do? what would happen if we began thinking and living differently?

Well aware that not all students are engaged in the study of philosophy, the history of ideas, and/or critical humanities or social sciences, I maintain that, in an ideal scenario, any carpenter, chef, doctor, or dentist will also be challenged to think and use their imagination during the course of their education.¹⁴

§ 8. In the 1960's and 1970's, many societies in the Western world experienced a previously unseen flourishing of novel ways to think, live, and study. The protests of 1968 spread, casting doubt on traditional authorities and throwing a spanner into the works of a number of institutions. Previously unseen and unheard of forms of culture and life revolutionized countries like Denmark. Along with the propagation of the newfound notion of *learning* by progressive theorists in direct opposition to the traditions of top-down instruction, many of society's educational institutions were remodeled and equipped with what, back then, were exotic phrases and related practices, such as: project and group-based work; interdisciplinarity; and self-directed and problem-based study.

With the benefit of hindsight, one could argue that, paradoxically, the noble ambitions of yesteryear's reformists came to function as battering rams for a project-oriented, competitive capitalism with a strong predilection for self-directed employees and a ubiquitous drive for creativity, innovation, and 'positivity'. The critique of capitalism and the related criticisms were integrated, smoothing the way for incessant institutional modernization and the development of politics of knowledge.¹⁵

Whereas the developments 40-50 years ago surfed on a wave of emerging *bottom-up* movements, it seems that, today, the tables have turned. The silence is deafening among both students and ground-level professionals

here in the second decade of the 21st century; overcome, perhaps, by the constant march of reforms from the hands of policymakers.

The question — *What is education?* — must once again be asked by teachers and students in 2017 and in the years to come. More than ever before, there is a need to conjure up and try out unpredictable alternatives to the hegemonic matrix outlined in § 0: a fervent and unrelenting apparatus of control which is imprinting itself globally. This time, the alternatives need to be formulated both locally and globally by concrete agents at the grassroots level and presented to an as yet non-existent cosmopolitan public sphere for transnational educational thought which must be able to not only match, but in the long run even transcend and transgress the dominant narrative with its more or less identical and streamlined policy papers and governance initiatives.

§ 9. *It is always here and now.* We are no longer in 1789 or 1968, nor are we in 2097 or 2143. And yet *the coming society*¹⁶ is always already taking shape. Tomorrow has already begun, even though the past still has unfinished business. Whatever we initiate today has and will have consequences for the shape of tomorrow, both on an institutional (i.e. the material design and accompanying practices of education), ‘mental’ (i.e., the far from private lines of thought, distinctive characteristics, and personal

narratives of each individual), and communicative (i.e., what can be constituted socially through the exchange, sharing, and creation of speech acts) level.

The constitutive acts of the coming society are therefore accompanied by a powerful vision; reluctant to canonize some ahistorical answer to the question — *what is education?* — this vision bears a persistent process-ontological porousness and epistemological broadness in scope.¹⁷

The critical interpreter of contemporary educational policy is alert and ready to protest if and when this question is hastily brushed aside with unimaginative ‘answers’ and a series of familiar variations on the bewitching, and to a certain extent quality-indifferent, content of § 0.

§ 10. As if the poor reader had not already been bombarded with speculations, claims, and cascades of words, I will now venture into a lopsided, historical double exposition. While the year is 2017, and not 1945, I hope that it will serve as a both clarifying and thought-provoking finale. The end of WWII and the collapse of Nazi Germany’s regime of horror mark a long-lasting *Stunde Null* for the regeneration of the German nation. Time stood still; entirely new ways to think, live, and practice politics were required. The German systems theorist Niklas Luhmann spoke of a *Stunde Null* for sociology as well.¹⁸ The social sciences needed to be reevaluated in their entirety, and it

is hardly a coincidence that the *oeuvres* of both Luhmann and his compatriot, the philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas, took the form of grandiose and foundational theories of communication, innovating how society was to be both thought and spoken of. After all, the advent of radical, uncontrollable, and diversity-asserting theories of communication is easier in periods open to deep-lying and far-reaching transformation (e.g. *Stunde Null*) than under the rule of a totalitarian leader.

Yet here, as we near the end of our endeavor, self-critical misgivings are surfacing; indeed, it might come across as somewhat hyperbolic and extremely starry-eyed to suggest that the dominant educational discourse and policy finds itself in a crisis of legitimacy and governance comparable to a *Stunde Null* caused by the dominant educational discourse and policy (to paraphrase § 0). Unfortunate as it may be, we are not (yet) living in the ashes of an educational system that has fallen apart, and of which the state no longer has control.

In the pragmatic everyday reality of contemporary society, it is only natural that students want papers proving that they have learned something, that they are competitive, or that they dream of being employed in exciting jobs after graduating. It is only natural to have aspirations to earn a proper salary rather than performing unpaid work for architecture firms, journal editorial boards, radio stations, or government offices while hiding their fears that they

are on a direct path to joining the growing ranks of the precariat. Both study- and work-life have become risky places to find oneself in. It is not befitting, nor right, for any ontologist to ‘forget’ this reality.

We should, on the other hand, not forget Friedrich Nietzsche’s durable and at once ‘existence-ontological’, critical, and ever-relevant contention: one who knows *why* she or he lives can endure almost any *how*.

Today, both the existence and autonomous *why-ness* of educational life are threatened. The *whys* are paralyzed; trapped between the attempts to meet the demands of, and be able to honor, the *hows*. Our time is charged with oblivion and impatience. The entire education system ought to be rethought from the bottom up, by the pupils, teachers, students, and researchers. First then would we be truly capable of not only offering attempts to glimpse the future in answering the question: *What is education?* — but also the far more fundamental query: *Why education?*

Two tentative and anticipatory, but perhaps also slightly precipitous, answers to the *why*-question might be: (1) Education is its own justification;¹⁹ it is what it is by being what it is — which it is when it lives up to its name, without besmirching its own history or impeding its freedom to define itself; (2) education is education while all sorts of other things are all sorts of other things, such as the destruction and contortion of education through management by objectives, control, the shortening of the

time allowed to complete one's studies and all the other kinds of attempts to besiege academia and the autonomy of educational institutions.

In a little more than 50 words, the final two words of this essay — followed by a 'homeless' but hopeful exclamation mark — will echo valiantly in the dark night of winter. But it is no secret that any revolution requires agents of change and a widespread will for radical transformation. And unfortunately, neither currently seems to be on the horizon. *Reclaim education!*²⁰

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- 1 See Jens Erik Kristensen & Søs Bayer (eds.): *Pædagogprofessionens historie og aktualitet. Bind 1. Kamp og status. De lange linjer i børnehaveinstitutionens og pædagogikprofessionens historie 1820-2015*, Copenhagen: Upress, 2015: 237f.. In Denmark, primary schools and daycare centers used to be pre-educational 'systems' until the strong ideology and demanding and enforced reality of international competitive educational politics and economy (information and knowledge society etc.) became dominant. See also Steen Nepper Larsen: *At ville noget med nogen. Filosofiske og*

samtidskritiske fragmenter om dannelse og pædagogik [To intend something with someone (or: To have intentions for someone). Philosophical and critical fragments on education (or: *Bildung*, see § 7) and pedagogy], Aarhus: Turbine, 2016: 14f.

- 2 Cf. the Danish sociologist Jonas Lieberkind's PhD thesis: *Det edukative. Émile Durkheim og den moderne pædagogiseringstendens*, Copenhagen: DPU, 2010.
- 3 Cf. Steen Nepper Larsen: "Compulsory Creativity - a Critique of Contemporary Cognitive Capitalism". In: *Culture Unbound. Journal of Current Cultural Research*, Vol. 6, 2014: 159-177. www.cultureunbound.ep.liu.se/v6/a09/
- 4 This concept (in German: Wissenspolitik; in Danish: videnspolitik) is inspired by the French philosopher Michel Foucault's enlightening and critical studies of how knowledge, politics, and power get knitted closely together. The Danish historian of Ideas, Jens Erik Kristensen, gives a definition of the word in Steen Nepper Larsen & Inge Kryger Pedersen (eds.): *Sociologisk leksikon*, Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Forlag, 2011: 757.
- 5 For a thorough critique of evidence 'thinking', see Steen Nepper Larsen: Know Thy Credo — blinde vinkler i John Hatties evidens-credo". In: Jørn Bjerre et al. (eds.): *Hattie på dansk. Evidenstænkningen I et kritisk og konstruktivt perspektiv*, Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Forlag, 2017: 101-127. An abbreviated version in English: "Know Thy Credo — blind sport in John Hattie's evidence credo" can be found in *Journal of Academic Perspectives* # 1, 2015.
- 6 E.g. Peter Sloterdijk's explicit and energetic critique of Gehlen's "Mangelwesenfiktion" in *Sphären III. Schäume. Mesosphärologi*, Frankfurt am Main 2004: 699-711. In English: *Foam. Spheres III. Plural Spherology*. New York: Semiotixt(e), 2016.
- 7 See Steen Nepper Larsen: *At ville noget med nogen. Filosofiske og samtidskritiske fragmenter om dannelse og pædagogik* [To intend something with someone. (or: To have intentions for someone). Philosophical and critical fragments on education (or: *Bildung*,

see § 7) and pedagogy], Aarhus: Turbine, 2016 and “Top-down university governance eradicates thinking and good teaching”, in Joachim S. Wiewiura and Elias Westergaard (eds.): *On the Facilitation of the Academy*, Rotterdam 2014. www.sensepublishers.com/media/2288-on-the-facilitation-of-the-academy.pdf

- 8 Immanuel Kant: ”Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?“, i *Berlinische Monatschrift* IV, 1784.
- 9 See the German historian of concepts Reinhart Koselleck: “On the Anthropological and Semantic Structure of Bildung” in *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002: 171–207.
- 10 See e.g. Denise Bachelor: “Have students got a voice?” in Barnett, R. & Di Napoli, R.: *Changing Identities in Higher Education. Voicing Perspectives*. London and New York: Routledge, 2008. And see a harsh critique of the destructive conditions under which students have to study and university teachers have to teach and do their research in these times : Steen Nepper Larsen: “Hvilke konsekvenser har målstyringen af (ud)dannelse for universitetsansatte og –studerende”. In: Malene Friis Andersen & Lone Tanggaard (eds.): *Tæller vi det der tæller. Målstyring og standardisering af hverdagslivet*, Aarhus: KLIM, 2016: 255-278.
- 11 See also the American evolutionary anthropologist Terrence Deacon’s *Incomplete Nature. How Mind Emerged from Matter*, New York/London, 2012, for an insightful processual-ontological approach to the understanding of ‘nature’. Here, nature is construed as porous and unable to fixate. Of course, the perspectives of the suggested hermeneutical, phenomenological, and body-phenomenological approach deserve to be expounded. As a preliminary inspiration, here are five works from this author’s pen: “Becoming a Cyclist: Phenomenological Reflections on Cycling” in *Cycling Philosophy for Everyone: A Philosophical Tour de Force*, ed. by Fritz Allhoff, Jesús Ilundáin-Agurruza, Michael W. Austin & Lennard Zinn, Malden & Oxford, 2010: 27-38, ”Den ufuldendte natur — tanker om foranderlighed, ikke-reduktionisme og begrænsning, inspireret af Terrence Deacons værk *Incomplete*

- Nature* (2012)”, in *Cursiv* # 11: ”Pædagogisk neurovidenskab”, Copenhagen: DPU, 2013 121-132: www.edu.au.dk/fileadmin/edu/Cursiv/Cursiv_11_FINAL.pdf. ”Hjernen i Immanuel Kants senværk og Catherine Malabous samtidskritik” in *Slagmark* # 66, Aarhus 2013: 203-224, ”The Plasticity of the Brain — an Analysis of the Contemporary Taste for and Limits to Neuroplasticity”, in *Neurolex ... Dura Lex*, Wellington, New Zealand 2013: www.victoria.ac.nz/law/nzsl/PDFS/SPECIAL%20ISSUES/NEUROLEX/CP%20Neurolex%20Book%20Web%20All.pdf and *Menneskets plastiske hjerne — gådefuld og genstand for store forventninger*, Odense 2015.
- 12 Jacques Rancière: *The Ignorant Schoolmaster, Five lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991.
 - 13 See Steen Nepper Larsen: ”Efterskrift”. In Ida Winther et al. (eds): *Pædagogisk antropologi. Tilgange og begreber*, Copenhagen. Hans Reitzels Forlag, 2017: 291-311 for some portraits of thinking and daring, theory-producing students.
 - 14 See note 1.
 - 15 Congenially, the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben writes about *The Coming Community*. Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 2005 (original title: *La comunità che viene*, 1990). On the back sleeve, the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy writes warm and promising words: ”*The Coming Society* tries to designate a community beyond any conception available under this name; not a community of essence, a being-together of existences; that is to say: precisely what political as well as religious identities can no longer grasp. Nothing less.” D'accord! I fully agree.
 - 16 For an essay about the fundamental difference between ontology and epistemology, see Steen Nepper Larsen: ”A critical essay on the exertion of critique. On the impossibility of reconciling ontology and epistemology”. In Josef Früchtel (ed.): *Global Adorno*, London: Palgrave 2017 (*forthcoming*).
 - 17 See the Danish politologist (political scientist), philosopher and sociologist Gorm Harste's introduction: ”Luhmann — 'Stunde Null' for sociologien” to Niklas Luhmann: *Samfundets samfund (Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft, 1997)*, Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Forlag 2016: 9-28.

- 18 I.e. an autotelic (from Greek: *auto* + *telos*) phenomenon; a phenomenon which, like love, art, or friendship, is in the world to more than just perform a function (as, say, a hammer, equipped with a phenomenon-defining functionality).
- 19 Cf. *The Manifesto. Reclaiming our University*, Aberdeen University 2016 and Steen Nepper Larsen: “Et forsvar for universitetet” (preface to the Danish translation): *Manifest. Vores universitet*. Copenhagen: Forlaget Mindspace, 2016: 7-11.

WHAT CAUSES EDUCATION?

Anxiety and the Object a

Kirsten Hyldgaard

I have never met a star who didn't come from the same kind of insecurity. It is the things that you are missing that make you a star. It is not the things that you have.

- George Michael on BBC Parkinson Show

Two questions will be addressed in the following:

(1) Why do universities not give priority to education? The article suggests a formal answer on the basis of Lacan's four discourses.

(2) Why education? Why do we learn? Is it caused by a natural curiosity or is it caused by anxiety? Is it at all possible to control the influence that we undoubtedly have on each other, not least when we teach? This will be discussed in the context of the psychoanalytical concept of transference as a condition for and an obstacle to teaching.

Due to budget reductions on public spending in general, at least in Denmark, universities have suffered severe cutbacks. It is not the cutbacks as such that I want to

discuss. Rather, I would like to begin with a question that has always puzzled me.

There are and have always been duties performed in exchange for receiving one's salary as a professor; there is something we *must* deliver. This much is obvious. Both research and teaching is a must. A university professor's duties are divided between research and teaching. We are obliged to publish peer reviewed articles every year. To ensure this management has introduced what is called 'research watch' ('forskningsvogtning').

However, management also provides 'incentives'. These are motivating influences to how we might prioritize our duties. An incentive means that management does not stipulate what we *must* do, rather, it encourages us to channel our energy in a particular direction. This particular direction is not research in general; rather, management encourages us to compete for external funding. The incentive is an increase of salary and especially prestige, i.e. full professorships.

External funding is obtained by writing applications which is obviously time consuming. And why is that a problem? It is not uncommon that the success rate is under 15%, i.e. more than 85% of the applications are rejected. Consequently, we are encouraged to attend courses where we can learn how to write successful research applications. Not only do researchers spend time on writing these applications; researchers, who could have done research

and taught students to become researchers, are spending time in committees assessing these applications.

This represents a considerable amount of time, hence money — even if we are not taking into consideration all the factors that cannot be measured such as the effect of disillusion, opportunism, and cynicism.

So, why does management incite us to do this? For a very simple reason: Otherwise we would not do it. Granted, the official way of legitimizing this demand is that writing research applications clarifies one's thinking and one's ability to communicate the point and potential so-called impact of one's work. However, the most common complaint voiced concerns the time spent on writing research applications not having any positive effect on research. It is not just time consuming; it parasitises research and all other meaningful duties like teaching, attending staff meetings, presenting papers at conferences, and writing for or speaking to the general public.

So, to repeat, if this is the case, why does management incite us to do this? The answer is that universities are run like any other business. These days universities are at least semi-commercial. To be sure, universities are to a large degree sponsored by taxpayers' money. And is it not entirely legitimate that taxpayers have some kind of control concerning what tax money is spent on? This rhetorical question, this seemingly legitimate, commonsensical desire for control is also financed by the taxpayers' money.

There are at least two consequences. Firstly, if it has ever made sense to speak about freedom in connection with research, this has lost its meaning. Not even university management decides what kind of research is desirable; the decision has been handed over to external committees. Secondly, recognition, prestige is no longer granted to those who are supposed to be 'first among equals' but to those who are 'first' at writing research application, i.e. 'first' at being successful at obtaining external funding. This is all well-known and has been pointed out many times. What are the consequences for education and teaching? Qualifications and dedication, as far as teaching is concerned, have never granted anyone a full professorship. In other words, it is not prestigious to be a competent university teacher. In fact, if you spend more time than what is absolutely necessary to deliver just acceptable teaching quality you are not fulfilling the desire of the Other, i.e. management. More than 40% of the income of Danish universities comes from educational activities. To repeat, universities are run like any other business. The curious fact is that *nothing* incites university professors to deliver more than acceptable teaching quality.

Nevertheless, a considerable amount of time, hence taxpayers' money, is spent on 'evaluation' of education, on 'quality assurance' ('kvalitetskontrol'), on 'higher education accreditation' and so on. But, to repeat, as a university teacher, you do not prioritize your work tasks properly

if evaluation of your teaching signifies more than just an average effort.

The time you spend on teaching and coaching students is measured down to twenty minutes (reading 15 pages equals an hour, reading 10 pages equals 40 minutes, reading 5 pages equals 20 minutes). Whenever we are asked to do something, a conditioned reflex is the question of how many 'hours' this particular task is worth. University professors are wage earners like any other wage earner and have always been. Arguably, we have finally caught up to wage earner behavior. A perhaps not so paradoxical consequence is that my colleagues and I have come to consider this time management a defense against becoming overworked, a defense against excessive exploitation. With reference to the meticulous time management, it is legitimate to decline a work task. It goes without saying that it is the taxpayers' money that is spent on the administration of this practice.

Research-based education

Teaching at universities is supposed to be 'research based'. It is far from clear what is meant by that. What is clear, however, is that we are not encouraged to discuss this. Teaching is referred to as taking time *from* research, hardly ever as something that could or should *contribute* to research.

This is a curious fact. How can you give one toast speech after the other about the importance of education

and spend resources on accreditation and evaluation of education when there is no prestige, no recognition of more than average teaching effort? To my knowledge, no one has ever achieved full professorship because he or she was 'first' as far as research based teaching is concerned. To my knowledge, no one has ever — at least not officially — been fired for not being up to his or her task as far as teaching is concerned.

I have been privileged with the opportunity to volunteer my opinion to management in the field of university education. Why do I hardly ever, if at all, hear anyone else voice this? There seems to be a tacit approval of the hierarchy between research and teaching and the lack of connection between the two. Why do university professors identify with the low status of teaching?

There should be no doubt as to the fact that it is of no concern to students whether their teachers get their full professorship ambitions fulfilled. The problem is, however, that associate professors do what they are told. If teaching activities are not rewarded with money and recognition, we concentrate our efforts on guessing what kind of research will obtain external funding and develop our competences on the genre of research application writing — not teaching, not academic writing as such, but research application writing.

It has always been a bad idea to rely on individual morals when organizing a society. It would also be a bad

idea to rely on university teachers considering teaching a calling or as something that fulfills a desire for meaning in one's work life, which teaching undoubtedly does do for many a university professor. But students should know that if we are in a hurry to get out the door after the lesson has finished, and if we are not always giving students our undivided attention, then we are just trying to satisfy the desire of the Other, i.e. we do what management wants us to do. We try to guess the desire of the Other; this is what subjects do, this is what human beings do. We desire recognition, the recognition of the Other.

To be sure, we sometimes jokingly speak about 'education based research', i.e. when we talk about our efforts to make a closer connection between the subject matter of our research and our teaching, i.e. our effort to make our work life as meaningful as possible. By this we also recognize that it can in fact be productive for the research process having to prepare a presentation of a text for a lecture or a seminar and having to think a theoretical problem through in dialogue with the students. And sometimes, some of us can catch ourselves thinking that the dialogue with students struggling to understand the subject matter gives us a welcomed break from the tedious imaginary rivalry with colleagues for recognition, and that it gives us a no doubt also imaginary sense of nothing but the subject matter ruling the social relation. Then we wake up to reality. What could be the answer to the fact

that teaching is not recognized? A cynical answer could be that management knows very well that standing in front of students, seeing the expectation in their eyes, experiencing their loss of transference, their loss of respect, the loss of imaginary recognition when we are not up to the task is intolerable to most professors, i.e. those of us who are not completely lost to cynicism and disillusion. Management probably knows somehow that the immediate recognition of students — and lack thereof — is enough ‘incitement’ to make us do our job. Whereas we, to repeat, would never spend time on strategic research application writing if we were not ‘incited’ to do so.

To be precise, it is nothing new that teaching is not considered a contribution to research. It never has been. But why? The following will provide a formal, discursive argument relying on the psychoanalytic concept of transference and Lacan’s theory of the four discourses.

Transference

Teaching and learning imply social bonds. This is not just a triviality. Arguably, education is at play in any kind of social bond, but if we do not consider social bonds in general but rather the institutionalized social bonds called schools and universities — i.e. something different from what goes on in sports clubs, workplaces, and families — what are the formal conditions of teaching?

Education is a relation between a student and a teacher. This relation concerns a so-called subject matter. The

relation revolves around some 'thing'. It is not always altogether clear what this subject matter is and why the teacher is concerned with it, but teaching needs this reference to something outside the relationship between teacher and student in order to be called teaching. It is not enough to speak about 'relational competences' or 'learning to learn'. Teaching is a relation because we teach a subject 'matter' and we learn because we learn some 'thing'. To repeat, what the 'matter' is, and what the 'thing' is, is not entirely clear. I shall return to this.

Now, students, qua students, are not supposed to know; they are supposed to be lectured. This is the fundamental reason why they sit in the lecture room. The teacher is supposed to know. The psychoanalytic concept of transference refers to this indispensable *and* quasi-automatic mechanism.

In Freud, transference refers to repetition of infantile relations, i.e. we repeat the emotional matrix — loving and hateful, tender and aggressive — and unconscious conflicts with parents and siblings to future relations. In the following quote, Freud describes transference between analysand/patient and the analyst/doctor:

In so far as his transference bears a 'plus' sign, it clothes the doctor with authority and is transformed into belief in his communications and explanations. In the absence of such a transference, or if

it is a negative one, the patient would never even give a hearing to the doctor and his arguments. In this his belief is repeating the story of its own development; it is a derivative of love and, to start with, needed no arguments. Only later did he allow them enough room to submit them to examination, provided they were brought forward by someone he loved. Without such supports arguments carried no weight, and in most people's lives they never do. Thus in general a man is only accessible from the intellectual side too, in so far as he is capable of a libidinal cathexis of objects; and we have good reason to recognize and to dread in the amount of his narcissism a barrier against the possibility of being influenced by even the best analytic technique.

(Freud, S., 1968, pp. 445-446))

Transferred to the question of teaching, this implies that in order to learn you need to be able to love, to be 'capable of a libidinal cathexis'. Not everybody is capable of loving. Narcissism, the investment of libido in the ego — the specular image of oneself, rather than an object — can keep you in ignorance, can prevent you from thinking. And vice versa: The students serve the purpose of preserving the narcissistic teacher's imaginary, specular image of unity — wisdom, knowledge, the masterful grasp of the subject

matter. Seduction rather than teaching is at play. When this specular image of mastery is questioned, the reaction is often aggressive retribution: typically sarcasm, ridicule, and disregard or, in a milder version, endless speech that numbs listeners and covers up the fragile mirror image.

Lacanian psychoanalysis distinguishes between drive and desire, which may clarify Freud's concept of transference. When transference is both a question of the drive — libidinal cathexis — and of desire, the question of the Other's object, is introduced. What am 'I', if anything, to the Other *and*, more importantly, what is the Other's object. The question of the Other's object is vital for teaching.

Furthermore, Lacan clarifies Freud's concept of transference by interpreting it as being basically a love of knowledge, the Other's knowledge: The Other is 'supposed' to know, i.e. you do not actually know whether he or she knows; you only suppose it; you assume that he or she knows. This is the precondition for listening, for 'paying' attention. In the clinical psychoanalytic practice the analysand literally pays the analyst to listen. This is what analysts do. They listen. To be sure, analysts have to make a living too. However, there is also a less pragmatic reason for this exchange of money. If the relationship between analysand and analyst is not a professional one, something you pay for, the analysand cannot 'pay attention' to the effects of the unconscious, i.e. that the emotional ties and unconscious conflicts transferred to the analyst are in fact a repetition of infantile relations.

The analysand will keep repeating instead of remembering. Analysts listen. Teachers speak. Students listen. Students may discuss with the teachers, they may challenge, even fight the teacher provided they 'suppose' that he or she knows what he or she is talking about. Otherwise the teacher is simply irrelevant. Students' suppositions may indeed prove to be wrong, but disappointment presupposes an initial supposition of knowledge. The analytic and the teaching relation is antinomic,¹ but what teachers can learn from analysts is how vital it is how you 'position' yourself when being the object of transference. How do you *not* pose as an obstacle to the students working, thinking, and learning? In other words, how do you, as a teacher, check your narcissism?

Not all students consider you relevant. When this is the case, you stand powerless. Often, this is not a major practical problem at universities; students stop turning up or are simply absentminded. For better *and* for worse, we no more control the effect we undoubtedly have on the other than we control our own unconscious. As far as 'relational competences' are concerned, the unconscious formation called transference is an indispensable condition beyond one's control.

However, transference is not only love of knowledge. You may also hate. If you hate someone, according to Lacan, you 'de-suppose' him or her of possessing knowledge. He or she does not know the first thing about the subject

matter — as one's exasperated exclamation typically goes. He or she does not 'have it'. You do not respect the Other *as* Other when you hate or despise him or her. The teacher is a waste of time; he or she is likened to waste.

This could be one of the reasons why even seasoned teachers may enter the classroom or seminar room for the first session with slight anxiety. We do not often talk about it for obvious reasons: There is nothing to do about it. There are no guaranteed methods, no 'tricks of the trade' to ensure you the wished-for result because it concerns the fundamental vulnerability when confronted with the desire of the Other. Or to be more precise, it concerns the Other as subject, i.e. when students do not serve as backdrop for narcissistic speech. The concept of subject in Lacan does not signify foundation but what escapes being conceived of as an object of knowledge. The Other as subject is what potentially shatters the fragile narcissistic specular image of yourself as teacher.

Transference is indeed a semi-automatic mechanism, also in the sense that you cannot force it. There are typical strategies to protect oneself against this lack of control; arrogance is one of the most common defense mechanisms. But love can also be an obstacle. Love (and its measured versions, respect and sympathy) is indeed a condition, but it can stand in the way of learning and thinking. This happens when focus is on the (imaginary) relation between teacher and student — the libidinal cathexis of the other — rather

than on the question of what the object of the Other is. In this case, the students cannot pay attention.

The four discourses²

Now, if this initial, yet precarious, condition is in place how do we, the teachers, speak in the seminar room? How do we form, uphold or disrupt the social bond between teacher and student?

Speech in the seminar room is submitted to and formed by what Lacanians call the discourse of the university, i.e. the discourse where you are an agent of knowledge, where

<p>M</p> $\frac{S_1}{\S} \rightarrow \frac{S_2}{a}$ $\frac{\S}{a} \rightarrow \frac{S_1}{S_2}$ <p>H</p>	<p>U</p> $\frac{S_2}{S_1} \rightarrow \frac{a}{\S}$ $\frac{a}{S_2} \rightarrow \frac{\S}{S_1}$ <p>A</p>
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Lacan's four discourses. Originally presented
in Lacan's Seminar XXVII.

you as a teacher must refer outside yourself to the Other, the socially accepted knowledge.³ To be an agent of knowledge means, among other things, that knowledge is not 'yours',

knowledge is the knowledge of the Other, it is always 'according to ...'. A teacher's discourse does not allow for a sentence like: "Because I say so" — the quintessence of failure as far as pedagogics and education are concerned. It is an impossible sentence for the simple reason that you refer to yourself as the master who sets the rules of the game. Referring to oneself makes literally no sense. It is a master discourse. 'Let there be light' is the first master discourse ever, uttered by God himself, and it would make no sense to ask: 'Why on earth should there be light?'. 'Light' is not just a condition but even the nonsensical *pre*condition for everything, it is '*pre*' any other condition. A master discourse makes no sense; you simply obey it or you spend the rest of your life trying to figure out what it might mean, thereby producing chains of signifiers, S_2 , ad infinitum.

As a teacher, you cannot bark an order; you have to make sense. And making sense means referring to something or someone besides or outside yourself, saying "according to" Freud, Lacan, or this or that generally recognized authority on Freud and Lacan. Making sense means to refer one signifier to the other, S_2 , in an orderly fashion, ordered by 'the symbolic order'. If teaching serves the purpose of referring to oneself, the result is not teaching but seduction. Narcissism kicks in. To repeat, narcissism does not only pose an obstacle to learning and thinking, it is an obstacle to teaching.

A teacher does not produce new knowledge, he or she *reproduces* knowledge; a teacher transfers common knowledge, the knowledge of the Other. This might be one of the formal reasons for the low status of teaching, that teaching is not considered a contribution to research, teaching is only 'based' on research. In addition, this might be the reason why it is accepted, even expected of university professors that we deliver uninterrupted lectures that reproduce already given knowledge. University professors can even be the object of admiration when they do nothing but show their capacity for the encyclopedic memorizing of common knowledge; the professor as the epitome of a Mr. Know-It-All.

The discourse of the university does not produce new knowledge. This is presented in Lacan's formalizations wherein the split subject, $\$$, rather than knowledge, is at the place of production. The discourse of the university produces divided, split subjects. A traditional way of describing teaching is as giving something and thereby filling up the other with your received wisdom. However, rather than installing knowledge into the student, you either control the other in order that no lack shall present itself, or you install a lack, i.e. you stir up desire. The latter is the basis for hysterical discourse, i.e. discourse that challenges the master signifier, the response from the student: But why? The 'product' of the discourse of the university is the split, lacking, desiring subject. In your effort to transmit common knowledge you, at best, stir up desire, lack of knowledge.

There is indeed something the students do not yet know and, what is more, it is something worth knowing. The student may exclaim: Yes, this is all very well, but it only raises the question ... Or: Yes, but I still don't understand ... Why couldn't the answer just be ... And the teacher does his or her best to respond authoritatively to this challenge — without silencing the student with aggressive sarcasm or empty professorial speech, if he or she is worthy of the name teacher.

You respond authoritatively, when you refer to the Other, and you compel authority when you, literally, do not need to compel or force the student to do anything. A teacher can thank the work of transference for this effect. This is also what analysts refer to as 'work transference'. The discourse of the hysteric is the only discourse that has knowledge at the place of production. It is only by challenging received wisdom, the master signifier, S_1 , that new knowledge is produced. You need to castrate the Other in order to produce new knowledge. You need to expose the lack in the Other, expose the holes and inconsistencies in knowledge, i.e. the holes in the chain of signifiers. A teacher should answer as best as he or she is capable of, i.e. authoritatively, while accepting that he or she will never satisfy the student completely. There is always something left to be desired — for the student to think about, work on, and question. A teacher who is up to his or her task should be able to make room for this. Otherwise his or her practice

is literally a cover-up rather than teaching. Or to be more exact, it is violence. Protecting authority, not letting your lack be exposed, silences students — these endless, seemingly consistent chains of signifiers, this empty professorial speech or, in the worst case, defensive sarcasm.

Because a teacher has to refer outside him or herself, teaching must necessarily be conservative or conservatory. Teaching reproduces. You cannot intentionally teach students to be revolutionaries — even if this were a desirable goal. Upbringing and education are, as Freud also stated, conservative practices. You necessarily reproduce the ruling ideology, the accepted, common knowledge of what is ‘reality’. But your effect on the students, provided your position makes room for the unsatisfied hysterical desire, might make room for thinking, and thus a result that cannot be controlled.

What are you teaching and what do students learn? You teach something, literally some *thing*, some matter. And students, by questioning what is the matter, i.e. what is your object of desire, may learn something. It is not entirely sure what the ‘subject matter’ of teaching is. The notation of the object of desire in Lacan is the object *a*. This is the notation that refers to the cause of desire, the question of what the object of the Other’s desire is. Neither the teacher nor the students are the cause of learning, the object *a* is, the undecidable question of what the Other’s object is. The trouble with narcissism is that it blocks and protects against

this cause. To put it another way, what exactly the students learn is beyond one's control, no matter how much 'goal oriented learning' one's method might contain. So, teaching is not just a question of social relations; it presupposes an object, something that the social bond is *about*, the object *a*. If teaching is not about, literally, some 'thing', the object becomes the teacher him- or herself. This is not teaching, this is seduction; teachers and students lost in imaginary love. The disciples hang on the celebrated master thinker's every word. The disciples await his interpretations instead of being put to work. Rather than seduction the teacher's work is that of suggestion. We suggest that something other than the relation to ourselves is worth the while; we should divert attention away from our sorry narcissistic selves and suggest the object instead. The trusted teacher, apparently, considers something other than him or herself important, and what it is and why...

This is also the reason why a teacher cannot teach on the background of his or her own texts, because in that case the teacher cannot question what (in the present case) K. Hyldgaard's dubious points and perspective are. Self-reference is at play.

Anxiety as the cause of education?

So, what makes us think and what are the conditions for thinking in the seminar room? Why do we learn? The questioning, lacking, 'missing', and desiring subject is

the foundation of thought and other human excesses. It is not uncommon to hear philosophers of education claim that the desire to learn is founded in some kind of natural curiosity; we are born with a natural instinct or capacity to learn. The present author considers this an all too easy, even sentimental assumption. References to 'the natural' usually serve as a blockade against further thinking. According to Freud, we think and work because of *Lebensnot* (the 'life-essential'); we only think and work when forced to do so. This is founded on the basic point that the psychoanalytical concept of drive does not equal a natural instinct. Drives are not inborn. They come into being in connection with *Anlehnung*, that is, the satisfaction of biological needs. When hunger is satiated and thirst quenched by the Other, there is always something left to be desired, and the drive is this leftover, this insatiable, restless pulse seeking satisfaction by whatever means may be at hand. The assumption is that the reason why human beings desire to learn and the reason for human beings' excessive achievements in this respect — our constructive and destructive excesses in general — are both the insatiable pulse of the drive confronted with the equally insatiable desire for recognition and the fundamental anxiety of loss of the Other's love and recognition. What we 'miss' drives and haunts us.

So, what is the difference between teaching and education on the one hand and learning on the other?

In distinction from the concept of learning, education and teaching imply a social relation, a relation between a teacher and a student, a teacher who has an agenda, the gerundive, some 'thing' that should be learned. Education means etymologically, 'to be lead'. The pedagogue in ancient Greece was the slave who accompanied the child to school. Teachers are not masters; teachers do not possess knowledge. Teachers are and have always been slaves to the Other. This suggests the low status of teaching in comparison with research.

- 1 For further reading, see Millot 1997.
- 2 Lacan, J. *L'envers de la psychoanalyse. Livre XVII*. (Paris: Seuil), p. 79
- 3 For further reading, see Salecl 1994.

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7 QUESTIONS FOR THE PROFESSOR

Mladen Dolar

Slovene philosopher Mladen Dolar answers a series of question sent to him by a group of university activists from Copenhagen — known as 'Et andet universitet'/'Another university'. During their blockade of the rectorate of the University of Copenhagen, the activists from 'Et andet universitet' arranged study circles in which they read and discussed Mladen Dolar's text 'The Master and the Professor are Dead, and I am not Feeling Well Myself.'¹ The questions presented here have been formulated in their subsequent discussions.

1) Wherein lies the truth of the Humboldtian model of higher education (Das Humboldtische Bildungsideal)?

Humboldt University was the first major modern university, i. e. a university which was not based on the medieval tradition that shaped the bulk of the then existing universities, most of them venerable institutions of long standing. It was established anew in 1809, after the devastation of the

Napoleonic victory in Prussia, and was thus virtually the first university after the French revolution (along with the *École normale supérieure* established by Napoleon at roughly the same time in Paris, but with different goals).² It was based on very laudable principles: the unity of teaching and research, the transmission of knowledge going hand in hand with the production of new knowledge; the community of professors and students in the common pursuit of knowledge; pursuit of knowledge for the sake of knowledge alone, not in view of training for professions and not complying with the needs of the state and economy; complete freedom of research, liberated from the pressures of religion, prejudice and state ideology; and last but not least, *Bildungsideal*, i. e. the idea that the pursuit of knowledge at the same time entails the formation of autonomous subjectivity, fostering independent judgment, combining erudition and responsibility. This was the blueprint that most of the modern universities were to follow. The proclamations sound great, the reality was different. Above all, the Humboldt model implicitly fostered the spirit of the elite; despite its universal aims, it was meant to be carried out for the enlightened minority, the privileged few, who were supposed to take the leading positions in society. The massive demands for the democratization of the university, to make its education accessible and available for all strata of society, put the Humboldt model into jeopardy. It displayed some hidden assumptions

of domination under the guise of praiseworthy pursuit of pure knowledge. Furthermore, its elitist enclosure came under siege from the growing demands of social utility and efficacy, combined with funding. Indeed, the model involved the very real danger that the knowledge produced in such an academic enclosure was cut off from the accelerating progress of economic and social realities. Its great advantage—knowledge purely for the sake of knowledge—was also its weakest point: academic knowledge out of touch with the social, not responsive to the needs of the exponentially growing economy and blind to the drastic changes in the social structure.

2) Wherein lies the truth of the student revolts of '68 and their ideals?

I guess there is no single truth of '68, there are multiple and disparate messages. First of all, the fact that these were student revolts is very telling in itself. The biggest anti-capitalist revolt in prosperous western societies after the Second World War was instigated not by workers or oppressed minorities, but by students, belonging to a relatively privileged part of society. The university was the locus of a social symptom, and Lacan, who coined the term 'university discourse' in the immediate aftermath of '68, certainly pointed his finger at this symptom, turning it into a diagnosis, claiming that 'university discourse',

after the demise of the authority of the Master, was the paradigmatic social tie of modernity. Pure knowledge as the agent of this discourse, promoting the key role of the colossal development of modern science, turned out to implement new forms of domination under the cloak of most commendable declarations. Student revolt demanded the democratization of universities, making them accessible to everyone; it was turned against the merely academic production and transmission of knowledge and it pointed at the far-reaching political dimension of knowledge production and transmission. It therefore demanded the inclusion of 'subversive knowledge' such as Marxism and psychoanalysis and it put into question the academic hierarchies and investiture rituals. The trouble with the student demands then is that they were largely justified but also far more recuperable than one could imagine. The demand for democratization turned into the massification of universities, with the lowering of academic standards and implementation of testing. The demand for knowledge to address social concerns turned into the submission of knowledge to the demands of production and the market. This 'subversive knowledge' turned out to be easily tamed, as it could positively flourish in universities as its playground without having any serious consequences. The critique of hierarchies and feuds developed into the demise of the venerable figure of the Professor and into modernization of ancient institutions,

i. e. their functionalization. To sum up: what promised to be a radical revolt against the rule of the university discourse turned out, in its effects, to be rather an extension and reinforcement of its rule by new and more pervasive means. Yet, this gloomy outcome doesn't at all exhaust the student revolts and their political legacy. It is a lesson to be learned and can serve as inspiration for present fights.

3) Who should have the last word concerning the university and its purpose: the institution of the university itself or the surrounding society?

The slogan of the autonomy of the university is a double-edged weapon. Of course one should defend the autonomy of the university against the growing pressures of economic demands and efficacy; the pressures to mass-produce marketable knowledge; and the pressures to demote knowledge to information, testing and immediate practical use. But the plausible claims against such pressures often disguise less plausible agendas: the defense of acquired positions along with the established power structure and distribution within the universities. Anyone who has worked in academia for some time will know that universities are not just places of enlightenment, erudition, rational argument and progress of knowledge; moreover, whoever thinks that people with doctorates and high professorial positions are endowed with a higher grade of

rationality has never had to actually deal with them on a daily basis. Intellectual capacities and human decency seem to be equally and democratically distributed among them as anywhere else, with the aggravating circumstance that high grades and sheltered positions tend to bolster the fatal propensity for arrogance, conceit and prestige fights—all the more cut-throat for being conducted under the cloak of the high scientific ideals. Should the university or the ambient society have the upper hand, in other words, the ultimate say to determine the university agenda? The trouble is that both are split in themselves, in a variety of ways, so that the proper fronts are to be established not simply between the one and the other, but within both and across both. A very hard thing to achieve.

4) In this regard, is there a conflict between the ideas of *Erziehung* (the process of being trained for a profession and meeting political demands) and *Bildung* (the process of being introduced into the autonomous sphere of universality)?

No doubt there is a far-reaching conflict between the two, but also a ‘discordant concord, concordant discord’, *concordia discors, discordia concors*, as Kant put it in *The contest of faculties* (in a somewhat different context, but not unrelated). The university has to aim at two contradictory goals: first, it has to be attuned to social demands

and utterly sensitive for social changes. This doesn't simply mean it should train students for professions that society needs, but that it should constantly critically reflect on what the social demands are in the first place, for the social demands don't coincide with the rashly imposed and fluctuating market expectations. It should provide knowledge that is socially needed and useful, while also examining its utility. Second, it should dare to be utterly out-of-tune with the ambient society, 'anti-social', as it were, it should dare to produce knowledge that has no immediate utility, a knowledge that stands in opposition to the spirit of the times, an untimely knowledge, to use Nietzsche's great word, *unzeitgemäss*, beyond the framework of social pressures and expectations. This is what thought is — and maybe one should draw an opposition between knowledge and thought in this respect — namely, any true thought reaches beyond the limits of what seemed to be hitherto possible. It raises the claim to the impossible, beyond what is socially needed and acceptable. How to reconcile the two aims which are completely at odds? There is no way to reconcile them, but one has to work with the two threads at the same time.

5) What organizational form is fitting for the university: a democracy of students, professors and staff or the idea of an aristocracy of reason?

It looks like the assumption of your question is that democracy is a good thing and aristocracy is to be discarded, for who would want to make oneself ridiculous by defending the aristocracy of reason. But let me say: there is no democracy in philosophy. Look at its history: it can be summed up by a dozen names, or two dozen (ok, make it three dozen to appear more democratic). There is a paradox: philosophy's claim to abstraction, universality, conceptuality, theory, ideality can be pinned down to a dozen (or so) singular names. There is no majority that can decide about this — so are they to be taken as 'aristocrats of reason'? The idea of democracy is that every opinion counts, and since they are at odds one has to eventually count them. The idea of philosophy is that no opinion counts, as long as it is an opinion and cannot establish itself as proper knowledge. The divide between *doxa* and *episteme* is the foundational divide of philosophy. Having an opinion doesn't entitle anyone to anything in science.

I am speaking of philosophy since I am a philosopher, but I believe that the argument can be made, *mutatis mutandis*, for science as such. Of course there is a pragmatic assumption of democracy in science, the idea that the basis of scientific knowledge is ultimately the consensus of the

scientific community. Science is what peer-reviewers say that science is. Thus it would be ultimately based on vote, but the vote of those who have proven their credentials to be entitled to vote. Yet, if this mechanism pragmatically works and if we accept it as a rule of thumb to simplify our scientific lives, one has to be fully aware that this is emphatically not what science amounts to. There is no vote about truth, and ultimately no big Other of consensus to sustain it. In Lacan's theory of the four discourses, the discourse of the university is one of the four basic types of discourse as a social tie, but there is no discourse of science on that list — there is something in the discourse of science that is irreducible to a social tie, that is, to its social function, transmission and utility.

Yet again one has to work with two contradictory threads in hand: of course, on the one hand, the community of students, professors and staff—based on democratic deliberation—every voice has the right to be heard, every suggestion examined, every interest taken into account; but, on the other hand, all this is in pursuit of something that goes beyond any democratic consensus and dialogue, beyond particular interests and opinions, also beyond authorities and guarantees. It is like a utopian community which is democratically organized in view of something that reaches beyond democracy and cannot be construed in a democratic framework.

Let me add a skeptical remark on democracy in the classroom — the alleged democracy of professors and students, sitting around the table, freely discussing any possible concerns and grievances, the professor there as one among equals, everyone on the first name basis, buddy like, etc. I rather think that this is an insidious version of the figure of a postmodern master, the one who pretends to be your buddy. The professorial authority is not superseded by such a seemingly democratic arrangement, but enhanced by it and made more intractable.

6) What is the role of love in the university (φιλοσοφία)?

Given my background in psychoanalysis, I can only invoke the specter of transference. No knowledge without transference. Transference is at its core an affair of love (as opposed to a love affair). Freud famously wrote a paper on transference love, *Übertragungsliebe*, and pointed to the ways that transference works in what he called the three impossible professions: governance, education and psychoanalysis. These professions are impossible precisely because they involve transference, and for that reason, as Freud said, one can also always be certain of an unsatisfactory outcome. It is like squaring a circle. Socrates, whose mission was to pull people out of their embeddedness in *doxa*, in the received opinion, and push them on the way to knowledge, *episteme*; Socrates was an

emblematic figure of transference. His constant claim, as to his authority and knowledge, was famously that the only thing he knew was that he knew nothing, yet, in a famous moment in *Symposium* he claimed that "... the only thing I understand is the art of love ..." (177e). The man who doesn't know anything, except about love: the pure instance of transference divorced from any particular knowledge, but functioning as a pure injunction to knowledge.

No knowledge without transference, but transference is not an affair of knowledge. This is why Lacan based his seminar on transference (1960/61) precisely on the figure of Socrates. With Socrates, this link is spectacularly ostensible, but I believe that there is a moment of transference involved in every production of knowledge. Or, if one wants to sidestep the psychoanalytic vein, one can say no knowledge without passion. In Helvetius' *De l'esprit, On spirit* (1758) there are two sections with delightful titles: "On superiority of passionate people over reasonable people" and "One becomes stupid when one stops being passionate". It is not that passion is something that would lead reason astray so that one would have to be purified of it in order to pursue the high goals of rationality, it is rather that unless one is driven by a passion one would never seriously use one's reason. Psychoanalysis scrutinizes this point, love and passion being at the core of knowledge and rationality, which is not to say that one should debunk 'irrational' impulses behind the façade of knowledge and

rationality and reduce them to that core, but that the two intertwine in ways far more complex than imagined from the one side or the other.

7) Is the university of reason the best way to achieve communism?

The prospect of communism can only be conceived beyond the university, if by university we mean something that can ultimately be reduced to what Lacan called the university discourse. And this is what we spontaneously assume when speaking of the university, even if very critically, so that most of the proposed reforms of the university run out into implementing the social tie of the university discourse even better, to universalize it. The point of the prospect of communism would be precisely to invent another kind of social tie, another kind of discourse that would be able to counteract the framework of university as the modern site of production of knowledge. There is no blueprint for what that new social tie may be, but we must try to engage immediately in various kinds of activities that counteract the pervasive rule of the university discourse.

- 1 Published in *On the Facilitation of the Academy*, Edited by: Westergaard, Elias, Wiewiura, Joachim S, (Springer Publishing, 2015).
- 2 For the sake of accuracy one should add that École normale was established in 1794, in the midst of revolutionary turmoil, it was supposed to be the first revolutionary university, but it lasted a very short time: January-May, 1795. Napoleon relaunched it, but it got its present shape only under the Restoration, in 1826 and finally in 1845. The École normale model never concealed its elite nature (as did Humboldt), but flaunted it proudly and boasted about it up to the present day. Les normaliens function somewhat like freemasonry, and indeed freemasonry was an Enlightenment phenomenon, an enlightened select exclusive group, destined to rule the society, making its coming out after being a hidden sect.

FROM THE ACADEMY TO KUA

A Brief History of Learned Institutions or Madhouses

Steen Ebbesen

The author is a former professor of Greek and Latin in the University of Copenhagen, who became an emeritus in 2016. The following is a somewhat edited English version of his Danish-language valedictory lecture, delivered on November 18, 2016, in KUA, i.e. the building complex housing the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Copenhagen. He wishes to thank his former pupil, professor David Bloch, for critical comments on a first draft of this English version.

It is today fifty-two years and two and a half months since I started working in the University of Copenhagen. I was eighteen, and had been enrolled as a student of classical philology and Russian. Classics was a full education, but in those days, nothing prevented one from studying and taking a degree in as many extra subjects as one could manage.¹

In the students' manual issued by the faculty of philosophy,² classical philology occupied 24 small pages (size A5) in all. Five of these contained a list of recommended books, most of the rest detailed the examination

requirements for the six different degrees joined under the umbrella of classical philology. Less than two pages were spent on advice about how to conduct one's studies. The first paragraph is memorable:³

The study is free, and the decisive factor is and remains the continuous reading of texts, translations and secondary literature. Students are, however, especially during their first terms, advised to attend those university lessons that follow a rotating schedule.

Notice the initial proclamation: *The study is free*. And so it was. You could spend as much or as little time as you pleased on it, and you could follow whichever lessons you fancied; even the few rotating courses were not obligatory. If you wanted to obtain a degree, you would have to know your stuff on the day of judgement, but nobody was going to ask you how you learned it or how much time you had spent on learning it. There were three sets of examinations in all: (1) a minor exam in general philosophy, usually taken after the first year, and required for admission to (2) one oral and two written tests, usually absolved one or two years later. (2) gave no academic title but had to be passed before (3) the degree examination, usually taken about four years after (2), and consisting of a thesis, three written and three oral exams. After (3)

you could walk away with the title of *cand. mag.* (in full: *candidatus magisterii*), roughly equivalent to M.A. If one wanted to qualify in further disciplines outside classics, degrees roughly corresponding to a B.A. were available. For me, entering the university felt like being a small child let loose in a candy shop. In my first semester, I followed lectures and other sorts of lessons on general phonetics, Russian, archaic Greek art, the Homeric Hymns, Euripides' *Hippolytus*, Greek religion, Greek prose composition, Terence's *Phormio*, Virgil, Ovid, late Latin, the development from Latin to the Romance languages, and medieval Latin poetry. Later I reduced the number of hours spent in classrooms from twenty-four to something like six or eight a week. Of the recommended rotating courses, I only attended one semester of Latin and one of Greek prose composition.

In 1966, I went to Thessaloniki in Greece for a year of study there. No formalities were needed to be allowed to be away from my home university for a year, nor did I have to bother about a transfer of ECTS points after my return. But I did get something for having learned proper Modern Greek: my classics professor, Johnny Christensen, asked me if I would be so kind as to take a minor degree in Modern Greek because he had just instituted such a degree and would like someone to use the opportunity. I obliged, and in 1968 I obtained the degree of *cand. art.* in Modern Greek, but then decided to drop my initial

idea of also graduating in Russian. Incidentally, my new title served me well, for it allowed me to serve as a Greek interpreter to the Danish police and law courts, and the income from that activity helped keep me economically afloat during my remaining student years. Tuition was free, but we had to find the means to pay for food, books, clothing and lodging ourselves.

Not all my teachers were equally inspiring, but a sufficient amount of them were guided by the same spirit as Hans Brøchner, a 19th-century Danish professor of philosophy, who in 1860 had finished his inaugural lecture with these words to the students:⁴

I hope I shall succeed, as we jointly engage in the quest for truth, to win and deserve your trust. At the present moment, when we are still strangers to each other, I can only demand one thing of you: that you trust science, trust thought, trust yourselves.

Brøchner, of course, used *science* in the old broad sense of *scientia*, not in the modern English sense which excludes the humanities from science.

To the most inspiring among my teachers I got a relationship so close that to this very day I proudly proclaim everywhere in the world that I am a pupil of Johnny Christensen and Jan Pinborg. Traditionally, the

teacher-pupil relationship in higher education has been close. Already in ancient times, biographers would classify philosophers in a sort of genealogical tree, with the relation “having heard”, i.e. being the pupil of, replacing “being the son of” in genuine genealogy. The mass university has made it difficult to maintain the close contact between teacher and pupil, but top scholars still ask each other: “With whom did you study?” and “Whose pupil is that remarkable young person?”.

In my youth, we usually referred to the University of Copenhagen simply as *The University*. Later it became fashionable to call it *Uni* (a loan from German, I believe), and still later to use the initials *KU* or *KUA*, abbreviating *Københavns Universitet* (University of Copenhagen) and *Københavns Universitet Amager* (Copenhagen University, Amager campus), respectively. In recent years those designations have received ever increasing competition from *The Madhouse*.

The history of higher institutions of learning and their names is closely linked to the notion of *philosophy*, which arose in the Greek culture about 500 BC. Pythagoras is the alleged inventor of the term *philosopher* or “lover of wisdom”. Cicero reports an anecdote about a visit paid by Pythagoras to the prince of a miniature state called Phliunt in northern Peloponnese:⁵

The prince asks him:

—What is your craft?

—I have none. I am a philosopher.

—What is such a one supposed to be?

—Well, you see, the life of man is like the Olympic games. Some participate in order to win prizes, others to sell or buy merchandise, and finally there are those who just come to watch and see *what* the athletes do, and *how* they do it. Life is like that: some strive for honour, others for money, and a few try to figure out how things are structured.

The anecdote about Pythagoras pinpoints something central about higher institutions of learning. Their purpose is to make people think and strive to understand what they see in the world. The ancients called that sort of activity *philosophy*, now the common name is *research*.

Research has always been closely linked to teaching. It takes a perverse researcher not to wish to hand his insights on to others. How Pythagoras did so, we do not know, although it seems indubitable that he gathered a group of adherents around himself. The vast majority of later philosophers have run a school, at least in the sense that they would give lectures and participate in discussions in definite locales.

Plato makes a point of portraying his hero, Socrates, in a way that no smell of the school-room attaches to him. The dialogues almost always result from a chance meeting at some undetermined place out-of-doors, though occasionally in a private house, and on three occasions in a room in a sports facility.⁶ But a totally different picture is painted by Aristophanes in his comedy *The Clouds*. There, Socrates and his acolytes inhabit a “little house”, which is their *thinkery*. Interestingly, it is suggested that it is adjacent to a sports facility.⁷

As Plato remarks in one place,⁸ ordinary people will easily get the impression that researchers are crazy, and Aristophanes accordingly depicts Socrates’ *thinkery* as a madhouse, where the inmates practice wildly speculative cosmology, try to figure out how many flea-feet a flea can jump, and learn how to turn black into white in an argumentation. If we strip away the caricature, we are left with a school in which both cosmology, zoology and dialectic are among the subjects cultivated.⁹

As is well known, Socrates was condemned to death for two crimes: lack of respect for the gods of Athens and corruption of the city’s youth. I strongly suspect he plied his corruptive trade near or in one of the city’s sports facilities, for nowhere else would he have so easy access to the sons of the upper echelons of Athenian society and thus, perhaps, be able to make them reflect a little upon their beliefs and prejudices.

Both Plato and Aristotle used public sports facilities for their philosophical activities. Such *gymnasia* had porticos (*stoai* or *peripatoi*) with back rooms (as one can see in the restored Stoa of Attalus in the ancient centre of Athens), and it must be such back rooms that the two philosophers (and later ones, like Zeno, the father of Stoicism) borrowed or rented from the city.

Plato established himself in a *gymnasion* called *Akadēmeia*. Diogenes, the father of cynicism, reportedly nicknamed Plato's institution, "Plato's destitution", thereby suggesting that attending it would bring one nothing of value.¹⁰ Yet, the "destitution" was to have powerful effects on European culture for more than two millennia.

Plato gathered a circle of dedicated adherents around him. He may not himself have lectured to the general public,¹¹ but it is rather clear that public discussions between his pupils, and probably also with participation from non-school members, played an important role in the life of his Academy.¹² Devoted pupils participated in reading groups where Plato's works, and possibly other philosophical literature, were studied and discussed.¹³

Plato had his opinions about how to pursue philosophical research. You have to discuss the matter under consideration thoroughly and take the time *that* it takes. So, you must have *scholē* — i.e. leisure, spare time —, and indeed, plenty of it, at your disposal. It is no use to declare a problem solved at 11 A.M. just because you

need to finish by then. That sort of slavish submission to the clock is found in law courts, so no wonder advocates are the way they are, Plato says. Research is a matter for free people who will not cease discussing until they have rehearsed all relevant arguments and are satisfied they have reached the truth.¹⁴

The word denoting leisure devoted to intellectual activities soon acquired new uses. A teacher's audience could be called his *scholē*, and soon one could talk about a teacher running a *scholē*. In Latin, that became *schola*, and now all European languages use adaptations of the Latin word to characterize teaching institutions. But schools typically have fixed timetables, and often have sinned so greatly against Plato's ideas that their pupils have called them treadmills.

Aristotle was Plato's star pupil. The very first sentence in his *Metaphysics* is "*All humans have an urge to know.*" And he was right: curiosity is a fundamental human trait. Most of us end up with a curiosity limited to certain aspects of the world, but a few keep a healthy and well-stimulated child's all-embracing curiosity. *Why doesn't a moo-cow have wings? And why does it say 'moo' instead of 'bow-wow'?* as an inquisitive boy asks in a Danish childrens' tale.¹⁵ Aristotle remained a curious child at heart and tried to learn about everything from cosmology to insects and logic, just like the caricatured Socrates in Aristophanes' play.

Aristotle, in his *Posterior Analytics*, formulated a number of conditions for when a piece of knowledge can be considered scientific. Crucially, it is required that one not only knows *that* something is in a certain way, but also *why*, and is able to give a generalizable explanation of the phenomenon, not just an *ad hoc* one. This conception of science is still the driving force of basic research in the natural sciences, even though Aristotelian causal necessity is now generally replaced with statistical probability. And, properly modified, the same conception also underlies good research in the humanities.

Both research and transmission of insights require critical discussion and although Aristotle had already as a young man created a somewhat more rigid framework for the discussions in the Academy than was to the taste of Father Plato, he remained true to the Socratic heritage in the sense that he always saw discussion as the natural setting of scientific activity.

Aristotle was a fellow of the Academy for twenty years. Talk about *scholē*! Later, he started his own learned institution in a *gymnasion* named the *Lykeion* (Latin *Lyceum*) — in imitation of French and Italian usage (*lycée*, *liceo*); the name is used in Modern Greek to mean “high school”. Aristotle’s pupils were called *Peripatetics* after a portico or ambulatory (*peripatos*) in the sports facility, which probably means that he used a back room in the portico for his lectures. Like Plato, Aristotle did not charge money

for his teaching, it seems,¹⁶ but otherwise the Lyceum shared several important traits with later research and teaching institutions. A large part of Aristotle's preserved works must be, or have started their existence as, lecture manuscripts, and they generally presuppose an audience who were already well acquainted with his way of thinking and speaking. The inner circle of his students must have organized reading groups in which they studied the master's and other great thinkers' works. But according to ancient tradition, Aristotle also gave a daily lecture for the general public.¹⁷

The students must have assisted the master in gathering extensive collections of empirical data, such as descriptions of the constitutions of no less than 158 city states, which Aristotle needed as background material for developing his political philosophy. Also, with or without interference from the master, the students would have organized dialectical training sessions and participated in public debates. To all appearances, Athens had a lively debating culture, where philosophers competed about primacy and their acolytes sharpened their claws in debates with students of their master's competitors, and did so in front of an audience, whose approval or disapproval in practice decided who was the winner and who the loser in the competition of wits.¹⁸

It cannot have been boring to belong to the environment around Aristotle, and, as one might expect, several

of his pupils later made considerable contributions to a wide array of disciplines.

Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum survived as institutions for some 250 years after the death of their founders. Apparently, the death blow was dealt when the Roman general Sulla's soldiers sacked Athens in 86 B.C., after which Athens ceased to be the dominating seat of learning in the ancient world. In late antiquity, even philosophers belonging to the Platonist and Aristotelian traditions were not above taking money for their teaching, whether directly from their pupils or in the form of public salaries, but, more worryingly, the way they transmitted their own and their predecessors' thoughts became increasingly standardized to the detriment of the culture of discussion by which genuine philosophical research lives. Occasionally, though, a good, heated discussion could flare up, particularly when educated Christians and pagans engaged in battle over such issues as whether the world is temporally finite or not.¹⁹

The victory of Christianity brought with it a widely held suspicious attitude toward worldly learning. Human curiosity could not be suppressed, but for a long time it had to work within rather narrow borders. In the twelfth century, people began to break out from those borders, and Paris in particular developed a research and teaching environment as vibrantly dynamic as that of Aristotle's Athens.

Top intellectuals set up shop, selling higher education, and students flocked to Paris from all over Western Europe,

arriving even from such far-away countries as Denmark in order to learn logic, linguistics, cosmology and various other philosophical disciplines. Works by Aristotle and other ancient authors were used as basic textbooks, but although the exegesis of those fundamental books formed the core of the teaching, teachers would also initiate their students into theories the ancients had never imagined, and they would train their students to submit the doctrines of the ancients to critical scrutiny.

It is one of the really strange aspects of Western culture that, at least in higher education, we pursue two goals that may appear contradictory. On the one hand, we try to transmit our own generation's knowledge to our young students, while we on the other hand train them to have a critical attitude towards traditionally accepted knowledge. 35 years ago, a young Japanese guest scholar worked in the research institute to which I belonged at the time. He discovered that in 12th-century logic there is a whole genre of writings about the art of finding an objection against just about anything.²⁰ Several European scholars, myself included, had seen some of those texts, but had not realized how peculiar they were; to us, being critical was the natural thing. Not so for our Japanese guest, who decided to investigate this weird phenomenon further, and thus discovered a logical sub-genre.

In 12th-century Paris, it mattered which master's school you attended. The leading masters each had their

own philosophical theses, and their pupils could then join battle with each other, each participant in a disputation defending the idea of *his* master. Like in antiquity, important masters sometimes had their school continued by pupils after they themselves had retired from teaching or died.

By the end of the 12th century, the Parisian masters got organized in guilds. There were four such guilds, called *facultates*, i.e. disciplines: *artes*, i.e. the liberal arts, (in practice almost identical with philosophy), medicine, law and theology. The four guilds were united in an umbrella organisation called *Studium* or *Universitas*. Modern popular accounts of the history of universities sometimes make a point of claiming that the designation *Universitas magistrorum et scholarium*, “Association of masters and students”, indicates that two groups of teachers and pupils were somehow on the same level, as opposed to the situation in normal schools where an abyss separated the pupils from the teacher. This is a piece of romanticism. The corporation was basically a super-guild for the masters of all four faculties, but their journeymen (*bachelarii*) and apprentices (*pueri*) automatically came under the jurisdiction of the guild, and it was important for the masters to stress that this was so, hence the inclusion of the *scholares* in the title of the organization.

The early university was a private institution and it was democratic: all teachers could vote and all could be elected officers of their faculty. To counterbalance the

influence of the so-called “higher” faculties — law, medicine and theology — whose teachers were both older, richer and generally had much better connections to powerful people than the far more numerous arts teachers, it was established that the official head of the university, the rector, should always be elected by and from among the *artistae*. The formation of a class of career administrators was made difficult by the fact that officers were elected for very short periods, typically only a few months.

The early university owned no real estate, but managed nevertheless to be economically independent of both secular and religious powers. With time, a tradition evolved in which the pope provided financial support to select teachers, but the dependence on the distant pope was rarely oppressive. Usually, he was actually an ally, as, for example, when local ecclesiastical authorities tried to exact money for issuing licences to teach.

The students enjoyed considerable freedom. To obtain an academic degree (as bachelor or master/doctor), certain conditions had to be met: one had to be above a certain age, one had to have attended lectures on certain central texts, and one had to have taken part in disputations — however, nobody bothered to update the list of required courses when a much larger selection of Aristotelian texts began to be regularly taught in the second half of the 13th century, so in practice the students must have had a considerable freedom in their choice of lessons to follow.

And then it was not all that necessary to take a degree. Sure, it conferred dignity on its holder, but only one job actually required a university degree, and that was the job of university teacher. Nowadays, “dropping out” is considered rather shameful, and in countries with state-paid education, drop-outs are often seen as people who have wasted public money. In the middle ages, there was no shame attached to leaving university without a degree, you had probably learned something anyway.

The faculty of arts became thoroughly Aristotelianized in the 13th century, and this in a very positive sense. People studied the writings of the old authority, but the goal was understanding, not parroting, and a lively culture of discussion prevented parroting from dominating the studies. What did the students learn? Of course, the current (more or less Aristotelian) theories in disciplines like logic, physics, ethics, biology etc., but primarily how to think and how to approach a theoretical problem. Evidently, many teachers and many pupils did not live up to the ideal, but for a considerable number of them it was a reality. Several authors quoted from the period, give the following beautiful characterization of knowledge:²¹

Knowledge is a possession to be held by noble spirits only: when spread, it grows, and it scornfully rejects a miserly owner, for unless it is made public and is multiplied, it will disappear.

There is a deep satisfaction in acquiring theoretical insight, and acquiring it is an important component in realizing one's human potential. As the Danish-born Parisian philosopher Boethius de Dacia says ca. 1270:²²

The highest good attainable by humans consists in knowing what is true, doing what is good, and enjoying both.

A study of the liberal arts did not prepare anyone for any particular job outside university, but the students gained general competences that could be used in many contexts. The University of Paris flourished from the early 13th to the mid-14th century. Oxford rose to prominence a little later, about the middle of the 13th century. As time went on, more universities were founded, but they were not all elite research institutions, and while much good research was still being done in the 15th century, there were alarming signs of arteriosclerosis. Thus, several universities prescribed that their teachers stick to the theories of one particular earlier thinker or of a few such famous men, such as Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, or John Buridan.

By the late 14th century, universities had become so ubiquitous in Western Christendom that any self-respecting prince felt that *so ein Ding muss ich auch haben*. One among those princes was king Christian I of Denmark

and Norway, who in 1474 travelled to Rome to obtain a papal bull authorizing the foundation of a university in Copenhagen. Unfortunately, he had no sense of money, and squandered so much on the way that on arrival in Rome he could not pay what it took to have a bull issued. The bull only materialized a year later when his sensible wife, queen Dorothea, undertook the long journey to Rome; she was a shrewd economist, who on more than one occasion had to help her prodigal husband out of a mess. After a couple of years spent on finding the means to run the new institution and hiring a team of teachers, the University of Copenhagen could start functioning in 1479.²³

Universitas Studii Haffnensis was a very modest institution with maximally a dozen teachers. Virtually all documents from its early years have disappeared, if no later, then in a fire that consumed the university library in 1728; but we may assume, I believe, that the philosophy teaching was at a decent level, as it seems to have been at the similarly small university of Uppsala in Sweden, which was founded in 1477 and from whose early years several manuscripts produced by students have survived.²⁴ As for research, however — forget about it!

If the intellectual level at the early university of Copenhagen was unimpressive, it sank to new depths when the institution was reorganized after the official adoption of Lutheranism by Denmark-Norway in 1536. The new statutes were the product of Johann Bugenhagen, whom

Philip Melanchthon had sent to Denmark as a substitute for himself after king Christian III had invited him to come and lay down rules for the reformed university. The one good thing one can say about the reformation university is that Greek was introduced as a subject, but that would have happened anyhow: in catholic Europe chairs in Greek were established at about the same time.

In spite of all sorts of privileges granted by Christian I and confirmed by later kings, the university in Copenhagen was now subjected to direct ministerial control. The king's chancellor was in charge, and in the 16th and 17th centuries, he did not shy away from interfering in the affairs of the institution, including strictly academic matters. In his own name, or in the name of the king, he repeatedly ordered the university to hire named persons as professors or to confer a doctoral degree on named persons.²⁵

In the minutes from a 1624 meeting of the university senate, one finds the following justification for nominating a young man to a vacant professorship:²⁶

Master Hans Resen was unanimously nominated by the professors because of his father's meritorious services to the university and the church, as well as his own progress in learning and singular modesty.

Daddy was a professor of theology, bishop of Sealand (the island on which Copenhagen lies), primate of the church of Denmark and Norway — and very much in favour with the king. The senate must have received a not-so-gentle ministerial nudge to unanimously settle on young Resen as the right man for the job. He did, in fact, take up the position after returning from a sojourn abroad, and at the end of his career he had managed to obtain the same prestigious titles as his father. Before he got that far he had, among other things, produced a dissertation on logic in which he unabashedly plagiarized one of his predecessors.²⁷

In the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, the University of Copenhagen was a miserable institution, primarily producing pastors (and bishops) for the churches and teachers for the Latin schools of Denmark and Norway, a few doctors and still fewer jurists plus various minor officials. To obtain the licence to become a pastor, two or three years of studies sufficed, i.e. about half of the standard time required to take a degree in the liberal arts at the University of Paris in the 13th century. Not much was left of the spirit from then, or of the spirit from Plato's Academy, although the institution often called itself *academia* in accordance with humanist practice. Of course, there were honourable exceptions in the vast sea of mediocrity, but the few whose learning and innovative thinking shone in the darkness managed to do quality work in spite of rather than thanks to the

environment in the institution at which they were employed. The situation was similar in many other European universities, for most of them had become dependent on secular or religious authorities or both. Bold new thoughts were most often thought in other settings. For, of course, there were still people with a burning wish to understand the world. The 17th and 18th centuries saw the rise of a new sort of institution: the learned society. Some of those societies called themselves academies, and they typically obtained state recognition like the British *Royal Society* (officially recognized 1663) and the Danish *Det Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskab* (founded 1742; literally *The Royal Danish Society of Sciences*, but the official English translation is now *The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters*). However, since they all had 'Royal' in their names, the learned societies generally escaped serious intervention from the central administration and managed to provide the forum for research and discussion that the universities could no longer offer. On the other hand, the learned societies lacked direct contact to young students. In the 19th century, the universities finally returned triumphant, the youthful dreams of the 13th century were revived and to a considerable degree realized.

The name that shines out is Wilhelm von Humboldt, the father of the University of Berlin, which is now named after him. In 1810, when he held a position in the Prussian government that we may only slightly anachronistically

translate as “minister of education”, he wrote a memorandum in which he stresses that universities should be something different than just extra advanced schools.²⁸ They should be places where man’s natural urge to understand can thrive within as free a framework as possible. The state must not, by any means, stifle this and should not meddle in the running of the institution.²⁹ About the nature of scientific knowledge (*Wissenschaft*, including both humanities and natural sciences), he says:³⁰

Regarding the internal organization of the higher scientific institution, everything depends on respecting the principle of viewing scientific knowledge as something that still has not been completely found, and never will be completely found, while relentlessly searching for it as such.

About the relation of the school to the university, he says that the transition from school to university ought to mark³¹ an incision in the life of the youth, to which the school, if it has fulfilled its mission, delivers over its alumnus in such a pure state that physically, morally and intellectually he can be left to freedom and independence.

Inspired by such ideas, people in the 19th century found a sensible compromise between a free general education and the state’s recognized need for expert

knowledge in ever more fields. In several countries, the result was university education of the sort that I myself have received. The final degree was called *candidatus magisterii* and the exam was called *skoleembedseksamen*, literally *school office exam*, meaning that anyone who had taken the degree was licenced to teach his subject in a high school. The requirements for obtaining the degree were meant to ensure that the graduate had at least the knowledge needed to hold such a post, but at the same time that the student enjoyed almost unlimited freedom from the time he entered university till he took his degree.

In many ways, I have devoted my life to the University of Copenhagen and I have much for which to thank the institution. In my youth, it provided me with great freedom to develop intellectually. In my mature age, I enjoyed considerable free space to pursue my research as I wished and to teach subjects I liked to teach, and in the way I preferred to teach them. In my last years, I have been sufficiently invulnerable to allow myself the luxury of flouting most of the rules that now restrict academic freedom.

But I do pity my younger colleagues who are now tasked with continuing the business in unreasonable circumstances, and I particularly feel sad on behalf of the students, who have lost the freedom that used to make an academic study a real development of oneself.

The so-called “student revolt” of 1968 happened while I was a student; it was not as violent in Denmark

as in Paris, but there was quite a commotion. Some of the troublemakers later became well-esteemed professors, and with some I entertain friendly relations, but that is in spite of, not because of what they did then. Among their achievements was a change in study programmes to the effect that many branches of the humanities jettisoned their historical ballast, e.g. focussing on modern trivial literature rather than older world literature, and dropping requirements that students of English learn Anglo-Saxon or students of history learn Latin.

The “68ers”, as they are called in Denmark, claimed, among other things, that they were revolting against “the regime of the professors”. Now not only the professors, but all university teachers and students have been robbed of any influence at the University of Copenhagen (and all other Danish universities as well), save for a few who have been hired as “leaders” — a term that gives bad vibes to anyone acquainted with European history in the 1930s — and for hostage members of the university board. But, some people in parliament and the central administration seem to think that even that is too much freedom. Recently it was suggested that the university board should have politically appointed members.

We are worryingly close to being back to the heavy-handed ministerial rule of the 16th and 17th centuries, only nowadays we are also burdened with a gigantic bureaucracy, which is sucking out all the oxygen from the system.

Study programmes are being organized along school lines, with little choice left to the students as to which courses to attend or when to sit for which exams. It is time the university reclaims its freedom and its soul!

So, dear students, now is the time to revolt! Revolt to recover and enjoy your freedom, while taking responsibility for your own lives! Freedom to structure your studies the way *you* want and freedom from petty gathering of *ects* points and a host of little exams with associated courses. Revolt for the right to work your butts off out of sheer enthusiasm and reach an understanding of your chosen area of study that will last you for a lifetime and not just ensure that you can deliver the right answers at the January examinations. You must find a way to resurrect the dying university in a form that suits your times. You cannot wait for three hundred years, as people did after the reformation!

You may have to make economic sacrifices on the altar of freedom. As long as the Danish state pays a monthly salary³² — however modest — to all students, politicians and civil servants are likely to feel obliged to rule the universities in a way that, in their opinion, will probably result in the money returning to the treasury. To achieve that aim, they want education to be short and to be tailored to the measure of occupations that they believe will generate money.

But, as Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle and the creators of the first universities had realized, knowledge is a good in its own right. It is a good worth pursuing no matter whether one can expect an economic reward or not. Man shall not, and cannot, live by bread alone; knowledge is also needed. Some knowledge then turns out to be useful in the production of bread, some just enhances the quality of human life.

- 1 Nowadays, Danish students have the right to pursue only one degree, although in the humanities this will often involve two subjects, such as history and philosophy or Greek and Latin.
- 2 *Studiehåndbog* for det filosofiske fakultet fra 1962.
- 3 Translated by the author. The same goes for all other translations in what follows. The Danish text ran: "Studiet er frit, og det afgørende er og bliver den stadige læsning af tekster, oversættelser og faglitteratur. De studerende rådes dog til, særlig i de første semestre, at følge den universitetsundervisning der er lagt til rette i fast, turnus-form." The rotating courses were few: Homer (1 semester), Greek syntax, stylistics and prose composition (3 semesters), Latin prose (usually a text dealing with the theory of rhetoric, 1 semester), Latin syntax, stylistics and prose composition (5 semesters, three meant to be taken before the BA exam, two before the final MA exam).
- 4 "Jeg haaber, at det skal lykkes mig, idet vi i Forening søger Sandheden, at vinde og fortjene Deres Tillid. I dette Øjeblik, da vi endnu er fremmede for hinanden, er der kun een Ting, jeg har Ret til at fordre af Dem: at De har Tillid til Videnskaben, Tillid til Tanken, Tillid til Dem selv." The words were taken down by one of the students. I quote from C.H. Koch, 'Hans Brøchners

bidrag til Kierkegaard-receptionen i Danmark', *Scientia Danica, series H, Humanistica*, 8 vol. 13, (The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters: Copenhagen 2016).

- 5 Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* V.III. 7-8. I paraphrase Cicero's text rather than render it verbatim.
- 6 Charmides in 'Taureas' wrestling court (palaestra). Lysis in a newly built palaestra just outside the city wall, Euthydemus in the undressing room of the Lyceum.
- 7 Little house: Aristophanes, *Clouds* 92. Thinkery: *Clouds* 94. Sports facility: at *Clouds* 179 a pupil relates how Socrates by means of an ingenious hook has stolen "his cloak from the wrestling-school (palaestra)".
- 8 Platon, *Sophist* 216c-d.
- 9 Aristophanes' Socrates is a composite character borrowing traits from several of the intellectuals of the time (Protagoras, for instance), but I am inclined to think that his running a sort of school is a trait that was shared by the real-life Socrates.
- 10 Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* VI.24. In Greek, the pun is *diatribē* "school, institution" — *katatribē* "wearing out, waste of time".
- 11 According to Aristotle, as reported by his pupil Aristoxenus (*Harmonics* 2.20), Plato once tried to give a public lecture "On the Good", but catastrophically failed to make his audience follow his thought. Most modern scholars believe this was Plato's only attempt to address a general audience.
- 12 This results from an analysis of Aristotle's *Topics* and *Sophistical Refutations*, both of which are generally assumed to reflect disputational practices in the Academy, even though they may not have acquired their final form till after Aristotle had started his own school.
- 13 In a few places in his *Metaphysics* Aristotle uses a "we" that must mean "we Platonists". On one of those occasions, I.9.991b3, he

says “As we say in the *Phaedo*”. He cannot possibly be trying to usurp the authorship of Plato’s dialogue, so the sense must be “As we say when discussing on the basis of Plato’s *Phaedo*.”

- 14 This paragraph summarizes Plato, *Theaetetus* 172c-173b and 200d-201c.
- 15 *Spørge Jørgen* by Kamma Laurents.
- 16 This appears from the way both of them portray “sophists” as men who commit the sin of demanding money for sharing their supposed knowledge.
- 17 Gellius, *Attic Nights* XX.5.
- 18 Like the assumption of disputational activity in the Academy, this is primarily based on an interpretation of Aristotle’s *Topics and Sophistical Refutations*, supplemented with scattered information about school rivalry.
- 19 See, for instance, R. Sorabji, ed., *John Philoponus*, (Duckworth, London 1987).
- 20 Yukio Iwakuma, now professor emeritus from Kyoto University, discovered the genre now known as *instantiae* treatises.
- 21 Thus, Johannes Dacus, ‘*Divisio scientie*’, ed. A. Otto, *Corpus Philosophorum Danicorum Medii Aevi I.1*, (DSL: Copenhagen 1955), p. 10: “Scientia est nobilis animi possessio, quae distributarecipit incrementum et avarum dedignatur possessorem; nisi enim publicetur et multiplicetur, elabitur.”
- 22 Boethius Dacus, ‘*De summo bono*’, ed. N.J. Green-Pedersen, *Corpus Philosophorum Danicorum Medii Aevi VI.2*, (DSL: Copenhagen), p. 371.
- 23 A scholarly description of the foundation of the first Danish university may be found in J. Pinborg, *Universitas Studii Haffnensis*, (Copenhagen 1979).
- 24 See A. Piltz, *Studium Upsalense*, (Lund 1977).

- 25 H.D. Rørdam, *Kjøbenhavns Universitets Historie fra 1537 til 1621, vol.4*, (Copenhagen 1877.) Documents 220-221 are letters addressed to the university by king Frederick II in 1580, in both of which he orders that named persons be promoted to doctors. In documents 115, 116 and 148, the same king “recommends” certain persons to the university. In documents 265 and 286 (from 1590 and 1592, respectively), the royal chancellor, in his capacity of conservator of the university, instructs the institution about whom to appoint to vacant professorships.

- 26 Original text in H.D. Rørdam, *Historiske Samlinger og Studier, Copenhagen 1890-1902, vol. 4*, p. 477: “Tandem de Professione vacante dubitatum est, quis in illam succederet. M. Johannes Resenius communi Dn. Professorum consensu nominatus est ob patris in Academiam et Ecclesiam merita et ob proprium ipsius in literis profectum et singularem modestiam. Magnifici tamen Cancellarii iudicium prius per M. Rectorem exquirendum.” For more information about Resen, S. Ebbesen & C.H. Koch, *Dansk filosofi i renæssancen, 1537-1700*, (Gyldendal: Copenhagen 2003), pp. 170-175. Resenius, *Disputatio logico-metaphysica prima*, Copenhagen 1634. The logical part was copied from a 1621 dissertation by P.N. Gelstrup.

- 28 W. von Humboldt, ‘Über die innere und äussere Organisation der höheren wissenschaftlichen Anstalten in Berlin’, in: *Werke in fünf Bänden*. Herausgegeben von A. Flitner u. K. Giel, (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft: Darmstadt 1964), vol. IV, pp. 255-266.

- 29 Op. cit., p. 257: “Er [i.e. der Staat] muss sich eben immer bewusst bleiben [...] dass er vielmehr immer hinderlich ist, sobald er sich hineinmischt, dass die Sache an sich ohne ihn unendlich besser gehen würde”.

- 30 Op. cit., p. 257: “Dies vorausgeschickt, sieht man leicht, dass bei der inneren Organisation der höheren wissenschaftlichen Anstalten Alles darauf beruht, das Prinzip zu erhalten, die Wissenschaft als etwas noch nicht ganz Gefundenes und nie ganz Aufzufindenes zu betrachten, und unablässig sie als solche zu suchen.”

- 31 Op. cit., pp. 260-261: “Auf der anderen Seite aber ist es hauptsächlich Pflicht des Staates, seine Schulen so anzuordnen, dass sie den höheren wissenschaftlichen Anstalten gehörig in die Hände arbeiten. Dies beruht vorzüglich auf einer richtigen Einsicht ihres Verhältnisses zu denselben und der fruchtbar werdenden Ueberzeugung, dass nicht sie als Schulen berufen sind, schon den Unterricht der Universitäten zu anticipizieren, noch die Universitäten ein blosses, übrigens gleichartiges Complement zu ihnen, nur eine höhere Schulklasse sind, sondern dass der Uebertritt von der Schule zur Universität ein Abschnitt im jugendlichen Leben ist, auf den die Schule im Falle des Gelingens den Zögling so rein hinstellt, dass er physisch, sittlich und intellectuell der Freiheit und Selbstthätigkeit überlassen werden kann [...]”
- 32 At the moment, every student above the age of 20 who does not live with his parents is entitled to approximately DKK 6,000 a month, which at the moment (late November 2016) is roughly equivalent to € 800 or £ 690.

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What is education? This question demands that we not only describe the general nature of education, but also that we describe the qualities, problems and conflicts, which make up the present reality of education. The question is thus as philosophically pertinent as it is politically urgent — it demands reflection but not without imposing confrontation. To pose it is a way of questioning the answers that define and govern what education is and can be said to be today.

The contributions to this volume are, each in their own way, results of this urgent question.

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